NOW AND THEN

Center for Appalachian Studies and Services/
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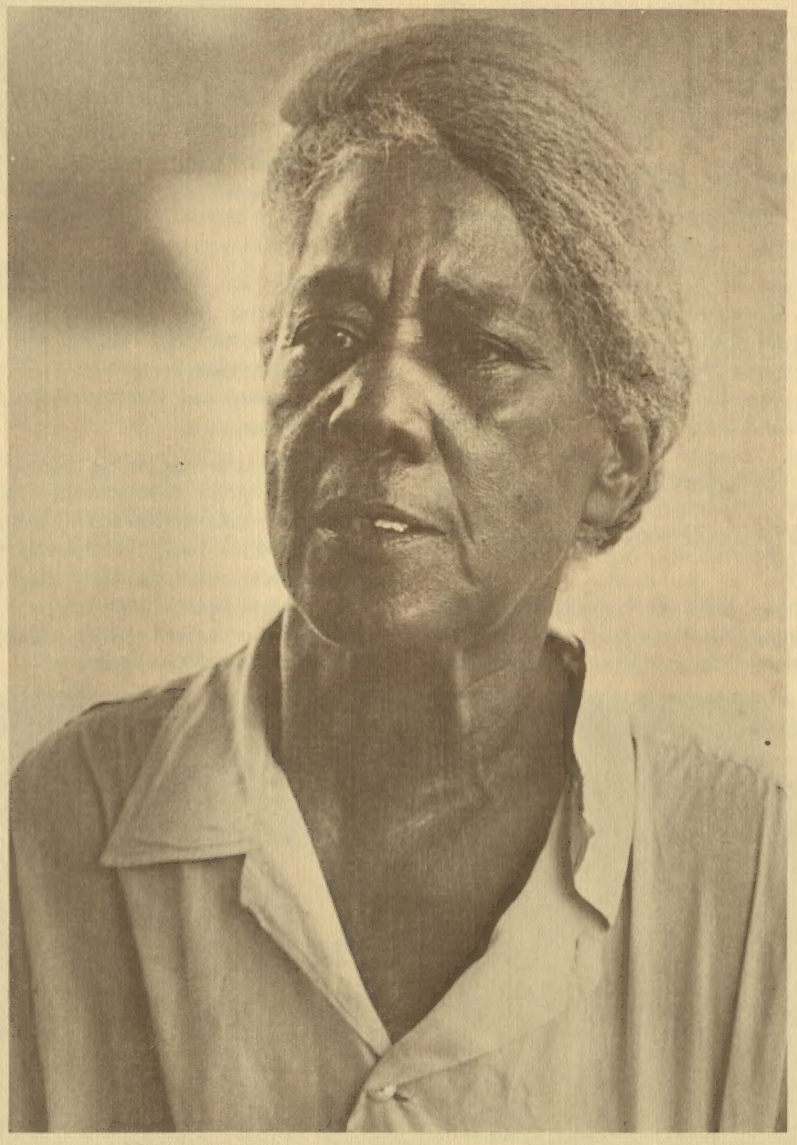


Glenna Thompson, farmer, Hurricane, West Virginia.
Courtesy of John Henry Memorial Foundation, Inc.

BLACK APPALACHIANS

Guest Editor: Ed Cabbell

From the Editor

Fred Waage

With the gracious editorial collaboration of Ed Cabbell, *Now and Then* devotes its Winter 1986 issue to blacks, whose central position in Appalachian history and culture has been consistently misunderstood and/or ignored.

The landmark text in making black Appalachians "visible" is *Blacks in Appalachia*, edited by Ed Cabbell and William H. Turner (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1985). This unprecedented study provides a frame of reference for the contents of this issue. Therefore, the following editorial comments are devoted to an overview of *Blacks in Appalachia*.

"Black Appalachians are depicted in this book as...a unified and coherent black community with a sense of peoplehood" (p. xiv). This governing premise of *Blacks in Appalachia* is presented as analogous to the characterization of Appalachia as a whole as a unified and coherent community. The ironic implication is that study of Appalachia based on the latter premise has often either ignored the black presence in the encompassing Appalachian community or assumed black assimilation into an ethnic-blind, pluralistic community as a goal or a reality.

In its eight sections, *Blacks in Appalachia* gathers studies, memoirs, and oral history to illuminate the unique peoplehood of Appalachian blacks. The names of the sections by themselves indicate the book's comprehensiveness: "Basic Approaches," "Historical Perspectives," "Community Studies," "Race Relations," "Black Coal Miners," "Blacks and Local Politics," "Personal Anecdotal Accounts of Black Life," "Selected Demographic Aspects." Also included are detailed bibliographies, and an annotated resource guide which features such entries as cultural organizations, recordings of traditional black musicians, black Appalachians in fiction, and theses and dissertations.

Although all the contributions to this volume are of great interest, some make particularly striking points with respect to the idea of a black community. Theda Perdue's "Red and Black in the Southern Appalachians" reveals that blacks preceded whites as permanent residents of the area, and developed strange mediative relationships with Native Americans and white lowerland slave owners. In "The Black Community in a Company Town: Alcoa, Tennessee, 1919-1939," Russell D. Parker presents in vivid microcosm the no-win situations in which blacks were so often placed with respect to their exploitive corporate employers and their supposedly supportive unions. In Alcoa, for example, imported black workers were given cultural and financial advantages to increase their productivity and reduce itinerancy; but those who sought to provide services (e.g. health, education) beyond a certain point, ones which involved acknowledging too much black peoplehood, were ruthlessly deterred. In contrast, the writings which discuss blacks in the labor movement—for example, Ronald L. Lewis's presentation of the letters of William R. Riley, an 1890's UMW official—show how often, despite some instances of effective "biracial unionism," black workers were forced into enmity with each other or authentic biracial union activism was undermined by its popular identification as purely *black* agitation.

Impressive also in *Blacks in Appalachia* are the personal anecdotes, ranging from Booker T. Washington's memories of childhood in the West Virginia salt and coal fields to Reginald Millner's conversations with his "ole Man," James E. Millner, who led a complex and resourceful life during decades as a West Virginia miner.

While *Blacks in Appalachia* presents the first panoramic view of its subject to appear in book form, it is surely not a criticism to assert that it provides but the starting point of a long-deferred investigative pathway; the 67 theses and dissertations listed in the "Resources" section indicate just how much information is available for further study of black Appalachian culture. The writings in this issue of *Now and Then* seek to provide additional access to dimensions of the black Appalachian experience.

Clarence Tross playing a 1905 Sears and Roebuck banjo, and grandson Sonny, Hardy County, West Virginia. Courtesy of John Henry Memorial Foundation, Inc.

Dachshund breeder, Monroe County, West Virginia. Courtesy of John Henry Memorial Foundation, Inc.

FROM THE DIRECTOR

Richard Blaustein

What does it mean to be black *and* Appalachian? How are the history and traditions of Appalachia's black people different from those of blacks in the Deep South and other sections of the United States? What do they share in common? What can black Appalachians tell us about larger questions of racial, regional, social and cultural identity? What forms have their expressions of creative energy taken in the past, and what forms are they taking today?

If perceptions of Appalachia in general are clouded by stereotypes and preconceptions, there is even greater lack of knowledge and understanding of the black Appalachian experience. Blacks comprise 10 percent of Appalachia's population, yet one would scarcely realize this from scanning the literature produced by regional scholars and writers. Through conversations with Appalachian blacks and through their own scholarly and creative works, this latest issue of *Now and Then* is an attempt to dispel the widespread and false image of a monochromatic, monocultural Appalachia. As Alex Haley, author of *Roots*, responded when asked to describe the underlying objective of his latest work in progress, a fictionalized history of the Southern Appalachians, it is important that we examine the myths and stereotypes surrounding Appalachia and, where necessary, explode them in order to fully appreciate the complex dynamics of the region's history and culture. Hopefully this issue of *Now and Then* will be considered a positive step in that direction.

In any event, we hope that you enjoy what you find in this issue of *Now and Then* and will help support us by becoming a Friend of the ETSU Center of Appalachian Studies and Services. Individual subscriptions are $7.50 a year for three issues; $10.00 per year for schools and libraries. If you like what you see here, let your friends know about us.

As I have said before, we've come a long way in a short time, but we still have a long way to go. Help us grow by becoming a friend of CASS. Subcriptions and larger contributions will be gratefully appreciated and should be made payable to: CASS/ETSU Foundation, c/o The Center for Appalachian Studies and Services, Box 19,180A, East Tennessee State University, Johnson City, Tennessee 37614-0002.

FROM THE ARCHIVES

County Court Records As A Research Resource

Ellen Garrison and Norma Thomas

Local court records are a valuable resource for researchers interested in the history and development of the Appalachian region. While local records offer lawyers, genealogists and local historians material on specific cases, individuals, families and businesses, these documents also contain information on many other areas of interest to historians, sociologists, and other scholars.

Most such records are retained in local court houses, and county officials must be commended on the care given to their records, especially since many are faced with the familiar problems of lack of personnel for servicing the material and of adequate space for storage. Recently two states in the region have inaugurated programs to work with these officials to improve the care and availability of local records.

In Kentucky, a law passed in 1984 adds a small fee to selected documents filed with county courts. The funds generated by this fee are used by the state archives to provide technical assistance and grants to county and municipal records programs. Four regional coordinators travel throughout the state, working with counties in preparing records for microfilming and in developing and implementing grant projects. Funds have already been given to counties for document preservation, start-up costs of county archives, microfilming vital records, and codification of municipal ordinances.

Under Tennessee's new program (which is part of the state's Homecoming '86 activities), bound volumes and selected unbound loose records will be prepared and filmed by the state library and archives. Five new staff positions will be created, and volunteers to arrange loose records will be solicited in local communities. Microfilm projectors, storage cabinets and microfilms will also be placed in selected public and college libraries across the state in order to make records more accessible to researchers.

Although local court houses are the logical source for information from county records, state archives and other repositories may also have this material. The Archives of Appalachia holds two groups of court documents: the Washington County (TN) Court Records and the Watauga Historical Association Collection.

Spanning from 1780 to 1960, the Washington County Court Records contain the files of administrative offices and governmental bodies as well as dockets, minutes, registers, legal documents, correspondence and exhibits pertaining to cases in superior, circuit, chancery and county courts. The 296 linear feet of records reflect the operation and activities of the courts, county government, local individuals and area businesses.

The second group resulted from the Watauga Historical Associations's efforts to collect and preserve the records of the Carter County (TN) Court of Pleas and Quarter Sessions. Included in this collection are articles of agreement, bills of sale, depositions, bonds and indentures dating from 1796 to 1866. These records offer insight into the settlement and early development of Carter county.

In these and other county court records a researcher would find material relating to elections, maintainance of roads and public property, and supervision of schools. These records also provide information on such topics in social history as divorce, care of the poor, and education as well as economic and commercial development. Although the use of local court records may require extensive research in drawing together fragmented pieces of information, the results can make the effort well worthwhile.

PRESERVATIONISTS & ACHIEVERS

Listed below are only some of Appalachia's black contributors to American society. Some are better known than others; all have their roots in the mountains.

NAME	ACHIEVEMENT
Deford Bailey	Country Music Pioneer
Etta Baker	Country Blues Guitarist
Ida Baker Wells Barnett	"Princess of the Press"
Tony Brown	Media Producer
Edward J. Cabbell	Black Appalachian Studies
Bernard "Bernie" Casey	Athlete, Actor, Painter
Ida Cox	Blues Singer
Angela Davis	Political Activist
Beauford Delaney	Painter
Martin Robinson Delaney	"Father of American Black Nationalism"
William Demby	Novelist
Julia Fields	Poet
Roberta Flack	Singer, Pianist
Arthur A. Gaston	Birmingham Empire Builder
Nikki Giovanni	"Princess of Black Poetry"
Hal "Sage" Greer	Athlete
Alexander "Alex" Haley	Writer, *Roots*
Nathaniel B. Hall	Teacher
Shirley Hemphill	Comedienne
Calvin C. Hernton	Sociologist
Clarke Jenkins	Researcher, "The Black Hebrews"
Norman Jordan	Poet
Eddie Kendricks	Singer, "Temptations"
Walter "Brownie" McGhee	Blues Musician
Floyd McKissack	Activist, Executive
Jackie "Moms" Mabley	"Clown Princess of Comedy"
Herbert Woodward Martin	Poet, Playwright
John Frederick Matheus	Romance Languages
Walter Dean Myers	Juvenile Novelist
John C. Norman	Cardiovascular Surgeon
Odetta	Folk Singer
William Pickens	NAACP Field Secretary
Barbara Gardner Proctor	Advertising Executive
Ishmael Reed	Novelist, Editor
Ida De Augustine Reid	Sociologist
James H. Robinson	Operation Crossroads
Sparky Rucker	Folk Musician, Balladeer
Sonia Sanchez	Poet, Activist
Nina Simone	"High Princess of Soul"
Ada Beatrice Queen Victoria Louisa Virginia DuConge Smith (Brick Top)	Singer, Cafe Hostess
Bessie Smith	"Empress of the Blues"
Mary Carter Smith	Griot (Folklorist)
Anne Spencer	"Genteel Lady Poet"
Leon Howard Sullivan	Originator, O.I.C. (Opportunities Industrialization Centers)
Ellen Tarry	Juvenile Novelist
Robert L. Vann	Pittsburgh "Courier"
Margaret Abrigail Walker	Poet, Novelist
Booker T. Washington	Educator, Statesman
Josh White	Folk Singer
Bill Withers	Balladeer
Carter G. Woodson	"Father of Modern Black History"

FROM THE REECE MUSEUM

Paul Byington

The Carroll Reece Museum celebrates Black History Month by exhibiting posters from its collection, "Black Women: Achievements against the Odds," a Smithsonian Institution Traveling Exhibition Service exhibit purchased by the Friends of the Reece Museum. The Museum also provides an exhibition at the Kingsport University Center.

Black women in America have had a double obstacle of gender and race to overcome in attaining their aspirations. That so many have succeeded in fields as diverse as sports and science testifies to their strength. Yet these achievements have largely been ignored and barely studied. The celebration of Black History Month each February has brought greater recognition to black women and their achievements over 350 years of American history. Black women have played prominent roles during important phases of black history in America including the anti-slavery movement, Reconstruction, Post-Reconstruction, the Harlem Renaissance, and the Civil Rights Movement.

In the years preceding the Civil War, black women such as Harriet Tubman, Sojourner Truth, and Mary Shadd Cary fought slavery by lecturing for abolitionist societies, writing and publishing newspapers, and organizing ways of escape through the Underground Railroad. With the end of the war, the abolition of slavery, and the Southern states under federal military rule, blacks sought the promised privileges and equalities of citizens. Blacks were without homes, land or education. Many women abolitionists turned their energies to the freedmen's needs of food, clothing, medical care and voter registration.

With the withdrawal of federal troops in the 1870's, Southerners instituted a policy of white supremacy in the South that left blacks segregated, disenfranchised and oppressed. The struggle for freedom was carried on by black churches, newspapers, social clubs and national organizations. Ida B. Wells Barnett crusaded against lynching by lecturing in the United States and abroad, and by publishing *A Red Record*, the first in-depth study of lynching in America. Several black women educators became founders and administrators of privately funded black schools and developed innovative curricula combining academic, occupational and black history courses.

Thousands of Southern blacks migrated to Northern cities in the early twentieth century. Black women organized clubs to provide schools, housing, day care centers and services for the newly arrived urban blacks. The National Association of Colored Women provided a forum for black women to speak out on issues. In this period Maggie Walker, founding her own bank, became the first American woman to become a bank president. In the Northern urban centers, black communities grew in pride and self-awareness leading to a burst of creativity called the Harlem Renaissance. Black music, dance, theater, art, and literature flourished, reflected in the choreography of Katherine Dunham, the poetry of Gwendolyn Brooks, and the blues artistry of Bessie Smith.

The Civil Rights Movement of the 1950's and 1960's saw black men and women organizing to press their demands for justice through non-violent resistance. Women formed the backbone of this mass movement, which led to the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, forbidding discrimination in public facilities and employment on the basis of sex, religion, national origin or race. With opportunities opened up, American women, including black women, have entered in increasing numbers professsions long dominated by white males.

"Friends," painting by Rita Bradley

I Y'Am What I Y'Am

Rita Bradley

You call me Black when my skin is tan,
my daughter is golden and my son's hair is bronze.

I'm supposed to be Soul yet I love country music, cowboy hats, boots, blue jeans and hoedowns.

I'm proud of my African ancestry but am sick inside at being denied my Scotch-Irish heritage. I'm one-third Cherokee Indian, happy about it, and look it.

I feel secure among the mountains. Nothing is more beautiful than the nearby ranges tipped with clouds. I love mountain crafts, mountain people and babbling mountain streams.

Oh for my spirit to be allowed to soar free. How I long for full acknowledgement as a true, intricate part of the mountain scene.

I am here, I belong here, Appalachia is mine and I am Appalachia's.

Artist Rita Bradley in her Johnson City, Tennessee home.

A Mountain Artist's Landscape

Pat Arnow

Rita Bradley fills all her landscapes with fanciful winding roads and green pastures that become a backdrop of green hills with blue-gray mountains always floating behind. Frank and open faces gaze from her portraits. In her oils, there are no seas, no deserts and no cities. It is the vision of a mountain folk artist that graces these canvases.

Since she is black she doesn't quite fit in with the prevailing notions about the mountains—that they are the realm of white culture and heritage. Seeing Rita Bradley's work and speaking with her, it becomes clear that some old notions need to change.

She agrees to talk about her art and her life. In a soft, thoughtful voice, she renders a remarkable picture of a long, proud mountain history and of growing up black in Appalachia. As candid and open as her portraits, she has much to share, stories that have been told and retold in her family, preserved as carefully as cherished heirlooms; and stories about her own experiences during a time of monumental changes for blacks.

Rita Bradley's forebears were the railroad workers, stonemasons, coal miners and farmers who settled and built Appalachia. They were a mix of peoples that could be listed as a composite of Appalachia itself—former slaves who farmed in the North Carolina mountains—and there's a Scotch-Irish lineage, there's the Cherokee that did not take the long march to Oklahoma when the Indians were forced from the territory in the 1830's, there was even a Jewish great grandmother. With her caramel-colored skin, American Indian eyes and high cheekbones in a round face, Bradley's looks reflect all that mountain heritage, and she's proud that it shows.

She says she has always loved the mountains, especially the fine view from her parents' front porch. Her mother and father, Mary and Thomas Owens, live in the same house where Bradley was born and raised, on Eighth Avenue in Johnson City. It's a neighborhood not far from downtown, but it's high on a hill with a vista of nearby Buffalo Mountain heading a ridgeline that extends to the Great Smokies.

was the norm in her neighborhood, says Bradley. The impression she gets from the media is that black families are almost all composed of the single woman and her children. This wasn't how it was when she was coming up, she says, and it isn't what she sees today.

She draws a cheerful portrait of her neighborhood, especially when remembering her grandfather, "Peep," who lived across the street, tending his garden with great care and breaking off bits from a big stick of peppermint candy for the children. And he taught his granddaughter to play the banjo with her nose. She laughs as she tells it, but won't reveal the technical details of the feat because she says it's embarrassing to plunk her nose now that she's an adult.

It was her grandfather who brought the family to East Tennessee in 1920, moving from North Carolina to work on the railroad between Johnson City and Erwin. He worked on railroads in the region for 30 years.

From the stories she has heard from older relatives, Bradley knows about her more-distant ancestors. To preserve these

Rita Bradley with paintings of her mother and father, Mary and Thomas Owens.

When she talks about being born on Eighth Avenue, she means it literally. Her mother gave birth to Rita—and to her five brothers and sisters—at home, attended by one of the town's two black physicians, Dr. Johnson. In those years, women in the black community did not care to go to the hospital to have babies, Mrs. Owens has told her daughter. She knew that the women who were hospitalized often had to go through labor and delivery in the hallway. The women who went through it said it was humiliating and extremely embarrassing to give birth without privacy. Times have changed. Bradley has had her children in the hospital and it has not been in the hallway. But she notes, "My three babies were delivered by white doctors. No black doctors were here."

While Bradley was growing up, her mother stayed at home raising her children. She was also a first-rate seamstress and made most of the clothing for her family. Thomas Owens worked as a brick mason, carpenter, contractor and minister. This traditional family

memories, she has written them out in longhand, covering some 40 pages. She tells about one great-great-grandmother, Grandma Hedge, who had been a slave. Her children were by her white owner. While she was a slave she was not allowed to sing. "That's *really* stripping a person," says Bradley. "The slaves would slip away by themselves and hum softly so as not to be heard. Even after Grandma Hedge was freed, she never sang, but hummed softly to herself, up until she died."

In another story she wrote out, she said, "My Grandma was approached by a white businessman when my mother was a tiny girl. He mentioned my mother's fair skin and blondish hair and propositioned my Grandmother. She told him my mom was fair because there was a time when her grandmothers couldn't say no. But she could sure say no now. She was 'fire and told' and she told him where to get off."

She knows that her great grandfathers, Great Grandpa Joe Owens and Great Grandpa Butler Owens, went to Fort Sumter and

helped to do some building there for wages, about 20 cents an hour, which was *good* pay then. This was before the Civil War. They were free and could work for wages. They were very fair and were not bothered and were very proud to be making money to take home to the families."

It was through Grandpa Joe Owens's son that Bradley's father learned to be a stone and brick mason. In his years in the trade he worked on brick buildings all over Johnson City, including seven at East Tennessee State University.

"These great-grandfathers who had worked at Fort Sumter were free-issued from a slave owner who freed the families he had fathered. He gave his descendants some goods and money to start a new life. Great Grandpa Joe added to his share through hard work and purchased 100 acres of land for $50.00 an acre at Bracket Town, North Carolina." That land remains in the family today.

Before the Civil War, living as free blacks was a rarity in the South. Some of Bradley's ancestors moved to new places and passed as white, mixing in easily. Freed slaves who continued living as blacks did not have many other free blacks to choose from for marriage partners, so there was some intermarriage, and Bradley is related to several of her ancestors in more than one way. She takes pride in her forebears who could have passed as white but who chose to remain a part of the black community, that when they had the choice, they chose to be black.

She also takes pride in the other parts of her heritage. It bothers her that being black is the only identity that is acknowledged. She writes, "I am aware of, and not ashamed of my racial mixture. I'm a product of a variety of peoples and cultures and I feel that I am a part of and benefit from each group. When it comes down to it, people are just people. There are good and bad everywhere, and I'm thoroughly convinced that the good *greatly* outnumber the not-so-good. When you can look at and appreciate individuals, you find desirable and common traits in each."

Growing up in East Tennessee in the 1950's and 60's, in a time of great change, she saw first-hand the good and the not-so-good in action. Remembering life before integration, she wrote: "We could go to one movie, The Tennessee Theatre, and sit in the balcony. We had a lot of fun at the movie. A group of us neighborhood kids always went together. I remember for one movie there was an overflow of whites. They let them come into the balcony, but roped off the area. We had to sit in the back of the balcony. The only word I could or can think of to describe this is: STUPID!!!"

She remembers shopping downtown in King's Department Store. "They had a separate water fountain, and a little bitty bathroom with 'colored' written on the door." Train stations had separate waiting rooms. Restaurants did not allow black customers to be seated and served. "Some acted ugly when they served us to 'take it out,'" she recalls.

While schools, restaurants, buses and trains were all segregated, the Johnson City neighborhood where she grew up was mixed. The black and white children always played together. It was only as the children grew up that they became infected with the prejudices of their elders. She vividly recalls one time: "There was this one little girl, a white girl, who used to follow us everywhere. She trailed us everywhere for years. Even when the children went to the movies, she'd sit up in the balcony with the blacks." Maybe it is because of the irony Bradley saw that she remembers so clearly when the girl changed. "I'll never forget the day she quit speaking. She had on my hand-me-down cape. It was a blue cape that Mother had given her and she turned her nose up and wouldn't speak, but was wearing our old, discarded clothes. She wouldn't speak and hasn't since."

Though black and white children played together, public schools were segregated then. So was East Tennessee State University. Until the late 1950's if blacks wished to go to college, the nearest they could attend were in Knoxville, Morristown, Nashville, or Greensboro, North Carolina. In the 1950's, Rita's eldest sister, Thelma, went to Bennett, a black college in Greensboro. Bradley tells how once when her sister was on her way home for a holiday she was put off the bus because "she wouldn't get up and move all the way to the back."

The color barrier only applied to American blacks, though, Bradley says. She recalls that when Thelma was bringing a friend from college home for a visit, a black Puerto Rican woman, the two were denied service at a snack stand in North Carolina. "Thelma's friend cursed the proprietor out in Spanish," reports Bradley. "When he realized she was foreign, he apologized profusely. He let it be known that he wouldn't serve any American colored person though. Carmen and Thelma both walked away, angry, and hurt and disgusted."

At ETSU too, the color barrier only applied to Americans. "They had black people going there. They just weren't from America. They were from South America and Africa. When I was in sixth grade they had an African student come and talk to us. And they had a lot of Iranians, all different types of people, darker than a lot of the black kids around here. But they could go and we couldn't."

Bradley and her sisters and brothers all attended Dunbar, one of the town's two all-black grammar schools and Langston, the black high school. "They were very good schools. I felt so much a part of everything, whatever was going on. We had plays and the band, glee clubs, FHA. School participation, school culture, we were exposed to so much." Bradley played flute in the band and graduated as valedictorian in 1961.

Opportunities were opening up for the blacks then. When Bradley entered ETSU in 1961, she was part of the third class that admitted (American) blacks. An older sister, Luellen, was in the first full class of freshmen in 1958.

Full participation was still not possible, though. While Bradley was able to join the college band and enjoyed marching at all the ball games, she was excluded from a band trip away from the school because of race. After an excuse was made to her, "away they went and I didn't."

While she attended the university, Bradley worked in the school library. That's where she met Rodney Bradley, whom she married in 1964. He was working his way through school then, in a job as a custodian at Tennessee Eastman in Kingsport. After he received his degree he remained at Eastman where he now has worked for 23 years. He is in research as a senior lab technician.

After Bradley received her degree in speech therapy, she worked on and off in that field and as a learning disabilities teacher. She has also worked in sales at the mall. Mostly she has concentrated on her home and children.

Several family members have now graduated from ETSU, including Bradley's sister and a brother, a brother-in-law, two nieces, a nephew and two nephews-in-law. One niece, Sonji Bradley, was homecoming queen. Bradley's son, Rod, is now a freshman there with a scholarship in music. All activities at school are completely open to him, his mother reports.

She says that when she tells her children about the racial struggles of the past, what it was like and how much has changed, they

can't understand. "I've told them how it was when we were coming up and they just can't grasp that at all." But she thinks it is important that they know, that they be aware of the past and the progress that blacks have made. And she knows that there is further to go.

In fact, Bradley says her children have at times felt the sting of racism in school. She mentions that a few teachers have made thoughtless remarks or presented materials in a manner that debased blacks. And the teachers' attitude became reflected in some of the children. On the whole, though, the children fare well in school, getting along well with both teachers and students, she says.

There is still neglect of black heritage. She recalls a speaker at her children's elementary school, a woman who came from the university to the PTA meeting to give a presentation about Appalachia, "and there wasn't a thing in there about blacks. They weren't in any of the pictures. She didn't mention any. And that bothered us. Because we've been here for ages and a part of everything. It hurts too."

On the whole, she is optimistic that progress will continue for blacks and that the goal of full equality will be achieved. This is based on her belief and faith in Jesus Christ. She knows He is there and can feel Him personally in her heart, she says, putting her hands to her heart.

Faith and optimism are the qualities that make her paintings such sunny visions. It was not until two years ago, when she was 40, that Bradley began painting. She first tried it using an easy-paint kit she had originally bought for her husband. Pleased with the result, she took a community class with Urban Bird. "I was so new I was lost, and I just got so I'd follow him around and hear what he'd say to each person. I wouldn't even paint in class. Finally, I went home and did a picture of Christ and took it in."

Now, she has more confidence. On the walls of her home, she displays pictures of her children, Rod, 18, Ria, 16, and Robbie, 13, and in the room where she paints, a den with a piano and family trophies, she shows the pictures she has done of her parents and nephews.

Spending up to a week painting from photographs, even using a magnifying glass to "get the eyes just right," she takes great care with the portraits. Some commissions have come from friends and neighbors. Selling the portraits has been a pleasant way for Bradley to "make some change," but it's the landscapes she most enjoys. "I just love them, and I guess it's a good change from the portraits because you work so hard to really get into the details. It's good then to do something free. It rests you."

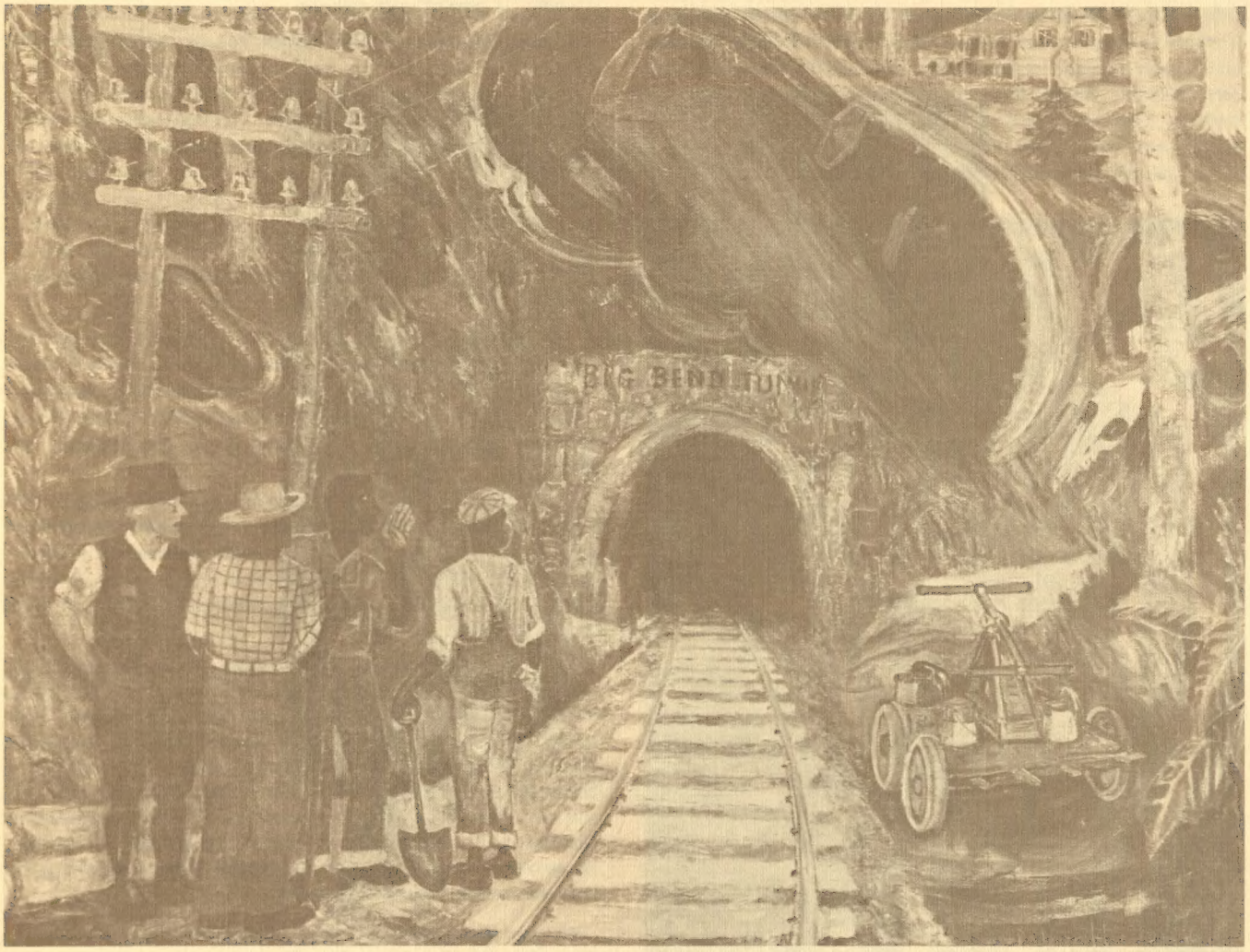
The landscapes express something of her hopes and wishes. In her newest painting, an elderly couple stand by a fence. In the pasture behind them a horse frolics. Nestled in the hills beyond is a church steeple, and further away float the airy blue mountains that grace all of her landscapes.

"It's called 'Golden Years,'" says the artist. She points to the newspaper photo that inspired it. The clipping, a color photo from the front page of the *Johnson City Press* is a portrait of a down-and-out man and woman. In the painting the couple looks more serene and cheerful than they do in the grim photograph. "I gave them a better life," Bradley smiles.

Merrie Jackson's Summers County, West Virginia family has been making quilts for three generations. This is her first one, a signature quilt. Courtesy of John Henry Memorial Foundation, Inc.

A Part and Apart

Pat Arnow



In the 1930s, folk artist Palmer Hayden painted the tunnel where John Henry worked. Courtesy of John Henry Memorial Foundation, Inc.

When John Henry raced a machine to tunnel through a mountain in West Virginia in 1870, railroad work and coal mining were drawing many blacks to the region. They've been in Appalachia ever since. But the rich mountain culture and heritage they have developed over the years has remained almost as submerged as an unmined vein of coal.

Ed Cabbell grew up and still lives not far from the mountain where John Henry won his race. An energetic man of 40, Cabbell bubbles with projects and plans. All of the work has to do with unearthing the unique heritage of Appalachia's largest minority—some one and a half million blacks, nine percent of the region's population. The quest is both personal and professional. Cabbell's family has lived in the mountains of Virginia and West Virginia for 150 years. His forebears were some of the first blacks to teach in the mountains, and his stock includes coal miners, preachers and farmers.

Just 40 miles from his present home in Princeton, West Virginia are the coalfields where Ed Cabbel spent his childhood. "I was born and raised up in McDowell County in the Southern part of West Virginia, which in the 40's had a high percentage of black people due to the coal mining industry. Maybe 25 percent of the people in that county were black. It was extremely unusual. So I was lucky enough to grow up in a mountain area, and fortunately I grew up in an area where there were a lot of black people." He says he has no urge to leave the mountains, though he is always willing to travel to talk about blacks in Appalachia. While he does not want to romanticize, he says, "There's something good about the mountains. There's solace here, and there's freedom here like nowhere else. I feel complete here."

Speaking quickly, almost without pause, he gives a rundown of the organizations he founded and heads. He created the John Henry Memorial Foundation, which has produced projects including a blues record and photography exhibition. That show, "We Be a Proud People," is on tour this year, being shown in Washington for the Appalachian Regional Commission's 20th anniversary. There's the annual John Henry Music Festival that he stages every Labor Day. He publishes *Black Diamonds* magazine whenever he can, and he co-edited a book published in 1985, *Blacks in Appalachia*. He teaches the black Appalachian experience. He founded a neighborhood improvement group. He sits

on the board of directors of the Highlander Center and the Council of the Southern Mountains. Besides all that he teaches in the local Princeton, West Virginia public schools. It all seems like more than one person can do. But Ed Cabbell is a man with a mission.

In 1969, when he was the advisor for black student groups at Concord College in Athens, West Virginia, Cabbell began focusing on the work to which he has become committed. As a recent Concord graduate himself then, he was not much older than the students. Together, they delved into the issues of the time. "Black people were dealing with identity as blacks. White people in the mountains were dealing with identity as Appalachians."

Ed Cabbell.

While he felt a pride in his blackness, much of what was being identified as black culture was quite different from his experience. In some ways, he felt more in common with the emerging awareness of the Appalachian culture. "I grew up around blacks who played banjo, they clogged, they did all sorts of things which would be unusual to some blacks, but to me it was just everyday. All my life I've lived around blacks who have had all these things as part of our culture. I wasn't raised up that these things were white."

Yet Appalachian folk arts and ways of life were being called a white cultural phenomenon. Being Appalachian came to mean being part of a white minority during those War on Poverty days of the 1960's. As a black, Cabbell began to see himself as "a double minority," a part of both cultures.

While he embraced both identities, he saw that as a black Appalachian, he was apart too, with a unique heritage. That was Ed Cabbell's watershed, in 1969, when he became committed to exploring the black Appalachian culture. "I'm very serious about this. I've left jobs before to do this. We're talking about my people, and not in a romantic way, but I see my true family, my blood. We've been in these mountains all these years and no one knows that we've existed. I am very dedicated. It's the only thing I've been interested in doing, particularly since 1969. It's not a thing that's nice to do, it's a thing I've dedicated myself to doing regardless of the cost."

The cost included leaving his job at Concord to go to graduate school at Appalachian State University in Boone, North Carolina. There he began compiling every mention of blacks in Appalachia that he could find. This project became his master's thesis, 700 annotated references. Still, "The literature is very limited," says Cabbell.

With a Master's degree earned from Appalachian State in 1983, Cabbell became the first black to earn an advanced degree in Appalachian studies. He also taught the first classes offered on the black Appalachian experience, as a teaching assistant in Boone, and at Concord College where he is currently an adjunct professor of Appalachian studies.

Blacks in Appalachia, co-edited by William H. Turner and Cabbell, (published by the University of Kentucky Press) came out of the master's thesis. Even though the book has a sociological focus, Cabbell is most interested in the culture of blacks in Appalachia. "One of the problems with a sociological essay—the plight of the black man in Appalachia—sometimes it seems like the only thing you can think about with black people is all of our problems and what we don't have. There are lots of things that we do have." He points out that, "In spite of all the lacks there is something that has made us stay here all those years."

To gain appreciation for that something, Cabbell founded his John Henry Memorial Foundation and John Henry Folk Festival in 1973. The tribute to the famous steel-driving man seemed a perfect symbol to Cabbell—a strong, tenacious, black Appalachian, building the region and building a legend. "John Henry conjured up an image of being black and had all those mythical elements that deal with black culture."

As the guest editor of this special "Blacks in Appalachia" issue of *Now and Then*, Ed Cabbell hopes "to do what I've always tried to do, and that is to make people aware of the fact that we, as blacks, exist in the mountains and that we have a culture, and we have a heritage."

He does feel there's a danger in making too much of the primitive folkways of mountain life. He wants to encompass all of what is going on with blacks in Appalachia, not just the quaint and picturesque folk arts, what he lumps together as "the quilts and blankets stuff." While he says it's good to know that part of the heritage, "I'd like to get rid of the stereotypes instead of accepting them."

To work on all these projects, Cabbell has an office in Princeton, West Virginia, the lower floor of a building that was renovated through the Neighborhood Improvement Association, which he also founded. A few steps above is his home, where he lives with his wife Madeline and daughters Melissa and Winnia (when she is home on vacations from the West Virginia School for the Deaf in

Romney). Madeline Cabbell also teaches in the local public schools.

Propped next to the door of Ed Cabbell's office is a larger-than-life size painted wooden cutout of John Henry. The steel-driving man of the last century and Ed Cabbell have a few things in common: the black Appalachian heritage, certainly, and also an enormous drive and determination. Between them, they may be able to dig out the display of the culture of the blacks in Appalachia. It's a rich vein that has remained mostly unmined. Ed Cabbell has tapped the resource and is bringing it up where it is starting to be seen and appreciated for its richness.

Miss Newsome of Union, West Virginia, a crystal checker at the Greenbriar resort. Courtesy of John Henry Memorial Foundation, Inc.

BLACK DIAMONDS: The Search for Blacks in Appalachian Literature and Writing

Edward J. Cabbell

Unlike white Appalachian literature, which has been discovered and rediscovered many times, black Appalachian literature has yet to be revealed and appreciated. Scholars, teachers, and writers have failed to focus on the black experience in Appalachia. When they do, they generally view the number of blacks in the southern mountains as inconsequential and treat their existence and plight as peripheral, but with relative social and economic equality. Thus, literature, the chief interpretive agent for understanding the history and culture of any region or locale, has failed to adequately explore the black Appalachian experience.

In an attempt to discover as much of the black experience in Appalachian literature as possible I first sought, located and identified blacks as central characters in over 20 Appalachian-related novels. Hopefully the novels selected will introduce you to an awareness and understanding of blacks in Appalachian literature.

These novels selected basically deal with violent racial relationships, juvenile fantasies, and slavery. Most of them were written by white authors and were strangely inferior and rather disappointing in relationship to their other novels. Their quest for a peculiar accuracy rather than richness of imagination made most of them lack

in significance, depth, and force. Second-rate Faulknerian intrusions are extremely distracting in these stark and sensitive novels that produce a sense of sadness, defeat, and decay. The best written characters are white characters although the black characters are usually full of determination, moral convictions, and exaggerated loyalties to whites in their struggles for black survival. Readers, particularly black readers, are likely to become baffled and disillusioned with the treatment of blacks in these novels.

Violent race relations is the most familiar fictional subject for black characters in Appalachian literature. In such stories we usually find an act of violence being committed against a young black male falsely accused by an angry mob for an act against the virtue of a white female. Through a series of flashbacks the mob scene usually emerges as the best-written and most effective scene in the novel. Moreover, the mixture of "peckerwoods," aristocrats, northern-style liberals, and black victims is much more the material for deep South literature than the literature of the Southern mountains. As a result most of the novels are classified as Southern rather than Appalachian.

William Nathaniel Harben was one of the first authors to use blacks as central characters in a novel based on an act of violent racial relations. In *Mam' Linda* (Harper, 1907) Harben focuses on a faithful black mammy and her "no count" son in a story of prejudice, lynching bands, politics and romance in Georgia. A young white attorney tenaciously defends the mammy's son who is unjustly accused of murder. In so doing he overcomes the tradition of prejudice as he fights lawlessness and outwits the lynching bands.

Almost fifty years later we find Byron Reece's *The Hawk and the Sun* (Dutton, 1955) dealing with the lynching of a lame black named Dandelion for an act he did not commit against the virtue of Miss Ella, a small southern town bookseller. The impact of the mob scene upon the citizens of the town, however, is the focus of this novel permeated with southern atmosphere.

In *Shadow of My Brothers* (Holt, 1966) Davis Grubb tells the story of a black boy who "leers" at a white woman in a grocery store and is murdered that night by her husband and police accomplices. The murderer, Loy Wilson, is revealed as a Virginia aristocrat gone to bad seed in the southern hill country.

Often these stories take on a convincing tone of reality. Indeed, some of them are true accounts. Robert Bowen's *Tall in the Sight of God* (John F. Blair, 1958) is an autobiographical account of a black family from Wilkes County, North Carolina. Elizabeth Forbush's *Savage Sundown* (Pinnacle, 1980) is based on an actual incident in northeastern Geogia in 1912 that resulted in the banishment of blacks from the area. James Streeter also tells a true story about five black children in Tennessee in his juvenile novel *Home Is Over The Mountain* (Garrard, 1972).

Lettie Roger's *Birthright* (Simon & Schuster, 1957) is biographical in tone. It focuses on a young and pretty teacher who is dismissed because of her stand on racial problems in a small town. Even Lisa Alther's *Original Sins* (Knopf, 1980) uses five protagonists (four white and one black) in turgid narrative that suggests that being southern is a handicap in the South as well as in the North. The ill-fated protagonists are sketched with a biographical flair that links us with reality in a tell-all book that might be more successful as a fantasy.

Joining these accounts of searches for pride and independence in the Appalachian South are Isabel McMeekin's two stories of her invincible Juba in *Journey Cake* (Messner, 1942)) and *Juba's New Moon* (Messner, 1949). Willa Cather deals with the slave relations in the hills in her *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* (Knopf, 1940) as does John Upchurch in *The Slave Stealers* (Weybright & Talley, 1968). Jane Curry's *Daybreakers* (Harcourt, 1970) allows children (two black and one white) to discover a fantasy world outside their milltown in West Virginia.

While these novels are interesting in many ways, they do not generally reveal a perception of black life in the southern mountains in the tradition of good, solid Appalachian literature. John Ehle comes closer to this perception than any other Appalachian novelist in his portrayal of Jordan Cummings in *Move Over Mountain* (Morrow, 1957). Cummings and nearly all the rest of the characters in this perceptive story are black. Presented as a very strong and good workman but quick to anger, Cummings finds it difficult to hold a job. He desires to take his wife and two sons north but decides not to leave his home in the hills of North Carolina. This is the literary tradition that separates Appalachian literature from southern literature. Ehle goes even further with black Appalachian character theme development in *The Journey of August King* (Harper, 1971). Williamsburg, a young slave girl, is running away to the North and freedom in this novel. She meets August King, a mountain man, who is forced to confront the belief that her freedom is his freedom too. In order to reach this conclusion he takes a journey within himself that reveals the classic essence of race relationships in the mountain South. Even the six black novelists with Appalachian-related manuscripts reveal no larger sense of this most engaging topic. In fact, one black author does not even deal with black characters in his novel.

William Demby's *Beetlecreek* (Rhinehart, 1950) and Virginia Hamilton's *M.C. Higgins, The Great* (Dell, 1974) are without doubt the best novels by blacks with black Appalachian themes. The traditional Appalachian themes of individualism and self-reliance, traditionalism, fatalism, and to a lesser extent fundamentalism surface quite well within these well written novels. Demby's *Beetlecreek* is basically a character sketch of Bill Trapp, an elderly white man who lives a solitary life near the black section of Beetlecreek, West Virginia. Johnny, a black youth from Pittsburgh, introduces Bill to the people nearby. Bill's shell is cracked and he decides to give an integrated party for the local youth. Ugly sex rumors spread after the party. Bill is led toward tragedy. This is a very good story but strangely it lacks the significance and depth of an outstanding novel. However, Demby, born in Pittsburgh and spending his early youth in Clarksburg, West Virginia, has an impressive achievement with *Beetlecreek*.

Virginia Hamilton, an outstanding writer of juvenile fiction, provides an interesting example of black Appalachian literature in *M. C. Higgins, The Great*. This winner of the Newberry Medal and the National Book Award is a moving story. M. C. Higgins sits on a 40 foot pole near his home on Sarah's Mountain (named after a runaway slave and ancestress). M. C. grows to understand through two strangers that both choice and action are within his power to escape the wounds of strip mining in the rolling hills of Appalachian Ohio.

Frank Yerby, an extremely popular black writer, provides a typical Yerby account about a nineteen-year-old white girl who flees to Augusta, Georgia from the Carolina hills when her father decides to sell her into marriage to a 65-year-old man of means to pay his drinking debts. However, Yerby's *A Woman Called Fancy* (Dial 1951) does not even resemble his popular novels *The Saracen Blade, The Vixen,* and *The Foxes of Harrow.*

Jesse Hill Ford's *The Liberation of Lord Byron Jones* (The Atlantic Monthly Press, 1965) is a well-written but complicated story told in a complicated way from the viewpoint of too many characters. Essentially, it is a story about a black undertaker in the Tennessee hill country forced to divorce his wife because of her open affair with a white policeman. The best written character in

the novel is white—Oman Hedgepath, the lawyer who accepts Jones' divorce suit.

John O. Killens provides an interesting account of the legend of John Henry in his *A Man Ain't Nothing But A Man* (Little, Brown and Company, 1975). However, even this well-written account does not seem to provide the depth and significance that this great legend deserves.

Juliette Holley, a lesser known writer, provides an interesting account of the world as seen through the eyes of a young black boy in the coal fields of her native West Virginia in *Jamie Lemme See* (Commonwealth Press, 1975). Although not a powerful story, Holley's account is well worth reading.

Roots author Alex Haley has a forthcoming novel, *Henning, Tennessee*. Named for his hometown, the story is to be about a man raising his grandson to be a "mountain man" in Appalachia. I look forward to the publication of this novel. Haley has long revealed numerous aspects of rural black life that would make fascinating material for good Appalachian literature. I sincerely hope that Margaret Walker, Sonia Sanchez, Nikki Giovanni, Ishmael Reed, Julia Fields, and Norman Jordan, all major black writers with Appalachian roots, will also choose to deal with their native southern mountains in their novels, plays, and poetry in the near future. There is a dire need for their creative expressions about this long-neglected region in American ethnic and geographic literature.

Primary non-fiction steps are being taken into uncovering the general history of blacks in the sourthern mountains. *Blacks in Appalachia* (The University Press of Kentucky, 1985), co-edited by William H. Turner and myself, presents a diverse group of scholars and writers and their views on various aspects of the black experience in Appalachia. Although much of the material deals with black Appalachian coal miners, the material ranges from the perspectives of Booker T. Washington and Carter G. Woodson to the studies of coal mine company towns by David A. Corbin, biracial unionism studies by Richard S. Straw and the personal accounts by Reginald Millner and Pearl Cornett. The selected readings are quite useful in Black Studies as well as Appalachian Studies.

Minnie Holley Barnes is writing some very interesting oral history accounts of her native southwestern Virginia through her *Glimpses of Tazewell Through The Holley Heritage* (Commonwealth Press, 1977). She joins Charles W. Cansler's *Three Generations: The Story of A Colored Family in East Tennessee* (Kingsport Press, 1939) and William Lynwood Montell's *The Saga of Coe Ridge* (The University of Tennessee Press, 1970) in combining local history, black history, and oral history for educational as well as entertaining reading. Nevertheless, today no comprehensive monograph has appeared of depth and significance to reveal a major insite into the essence of the black experience in Appalachia. The Princeton, West Virginia based John Henry Memorial Foundation, Inc. which I founded in 1969 is working very hard to remedy this situation. However, due to a lack of adequate funding our collecting and releasing of information on blacks in Appalachia has been rather sporadic—this includes the release of a primary and secondary source black Appalachian bibliography. Students in my Appalachian Studies classes at Concord College (Athens, WV) occasionally emerge with creative ideas and projects that include a Black Appalachian Trivia game. With time and increased support, I expect to see some real black diamonds emerge within the arena of Black Appalachian Studies.

History Uncovers the Role of Black Appalachian Women

Edward J. Cabbell

Racism and black "invisibility" in Appalachia have recently emerged as major issues in Appalachian Studies. However, the plight of black women in Appalachia remains largely unrecognized and basic information about black women in the southern mountains is extremely difficult to obtain. As a result, generalizations are dangerous to make and it becomes a major task even to try to point out a few trends concerning black women in Appalachia. A number of sources show that black women continue to face job discrimination, unequal pay, sexist educational and health care institutions, inadequate day care facilities, and many other problems shared by white sisters in Appalachia as well as by their black sisters elsewhere. At the same time, autonomy and power historically associated with mountain women as a result of their productive roles as craftswomen, farmers, preservers of food, and defenders of the home are not associated with black women in the southern mountains. We simply do not attribute to black Appalachian women the same romanticized strength and responsibility associated with frontier white women in Appalachia. Yet from their earliest days in the southern mountains, black women have faced stereotyped sex role expectations identical to those faced by white women in frontier society.

Enslaved black women came quite early into the southern mountains and were known to have borne children by the French and Spanish explorers during the mid-sixteenth through the late seventeenth centuries. Records are sketchy during these periods and

Claude, Neal, Maggie, Joe, Carrie and Jack Grimes of Boone, North Carolina. Courtesy of John Henry Memorial Foundation, Inc.

much is left to speculation since early explorers generally did not bother to record such relationships in their diaries and journals.

With the emergence of the British land speculators in the mid-eighteenth century, and the Scotch-Irish and German settlers in the early nineteenth century, however, we often find mention of black women (often the only females present) in the company of land surveyors in the "back country." Usually black women are mentioned as a result of the role they played during a hostile Indian raid. Quite often they are listed as having been taken prisoners by the Indians who had killed the men in the surveying party. Some are nameless heroines, as in the case of "negress' who helped Jonathan Jennings and his wife free their flatboat from a reef during an Indian attack while in the Cumberland region, or the "negro wench" who saw hostile Indians approaching the clearing of Bernard Sims in the Tygart Valley and gave the alarm. Whether slave or free, all women shared a similar role on the Appalachian frontier—one of family "duty," hard work and little recognition. Black women left few records, but were a substantial component of the pioneering population in the southern mountains.

The number of black women in the Appalachian South appears to have increased as they followed the stream of farmers entering the southern mountains just before the Civil War. Wealthy and prominent farmers who tilled the broad creek and river valleys, the richest and most desirable farming lands, had accumulated a few slaves as visible symbols of their wealth, power, and prestige. Small pockets of slavery followed these landowners throughout the mountains. By the mid-nineteenth century slave codes emerged, though much less severe than those in the "deep" South, as a means of dealing with this small but rapidly increasing black and mulatto population. Punishments began to vary greatly in regard to similar offenses committed by blacks and those committed by whites. Runaway slave advertisements were more frequently published in the local newspapers. Slave breeding also became more commonplace in the mountains. Fear of the "conjure" power of black women became evident as they became suspect in dispensing medicines to whites and engaging in "strange" religious practices.

With the end of the Civil War the children of the wealthier mountain farmers began to turn their attention from their family farms to the development of small commercial communities in or near their family land holdings. They used their influence to create new counties, towns, and county seats in the southern mountains. Often the "freedmen" would allow them as hired workers, the men in various menial labor positions and the women as house workers, domestics, or laundry women. As a result, blacks concentrated in the new commercial centers from the towns' outset. In most cases, there was very little difference in status between these "emancipated" blacks and slaves. Many poor white cove and hillside farmers were no better off than the newly emancipated slaves. In some cases, blacks may have had some privileges that were not enjoyed by their white counterparts, because of their closer relationship with their wealthy former masters. Blacks often helped white settlers to acquire wealth in the new townships. Whites sometimes rewarded blacks with varying degrees of social prestige, and limited economic and political status within their local areas. In many instances these mountain blacks, often from mulatto background, were of the same lineage and carried the same family name as the wealthy and prominent white families. These blacks acquired the earliest vestiges of education among blacks in the southern mountains. The mulatto schoolmarm was not unusual in the mountains, nor was her marriage to the local black preacher or prosperous farmer who served on the "colored" school board. However, it was not until the late nineteenth and early twentieth century that a sizable number of black women emerged as professional teachers.

Family of Henry Armour, one of the top coal loaders at the Wheelwright Mines, Floyd County, Kentucky in 1946. Courtesy of Alice Lloyd College Oral History Project.

The rise of industrialization and mechanization in the southern mountains after the Civil War brought an influx of black laborers from the Piedmont and coastal regions in search of jobs, primarily in the railroad and coalmining industries. Brought in as strikebreakers as well as surplus laborers, emigrating blacks were basically a submerged and illiterate population that upset the indigenous black population, and created a bitter resentment toward all blacks by displaced white laborers.

Few of the black migrants had had much formal education. To meet their needs, many black women in the mountains sought teacher training programs in the local black colleges. Other black women came from elsewhere to teach in coal mine, railroad, and logging camps scattered throughout the mountains. Nursing, hairdressing, and other related job opportunities also began to open up for black women in the mountains. Of course, the traditional roles of "domestic" or housewife were always available to them.

The black population in the mountains reached its peak numerically in the 1930's. Churches and schools provided leadership and community service roles in the "colored" communities that welcomed black women's skills and abilities. Thus, many black women viewed the mountains as havens of opportunities for them, if they could accept the social and cultural isolation of the hills.

Railroad and coalmining industries boomed between 1910 and the early 1940's. Black men with previously unheard of financial means were available as husbands. New and improved schools were being built for black children. Blacks and whites co-existed peacefully in the mountains.

But things were just too good. Daily, heavy industry acquired more and more machines, causing the demand for manual labor to decline. Resources dwindled. Class warfare developed. Racism was inherent in the class struggle, and blacks became scapegoats in the competition for dwindling resources.

Black women in the mountains took the forefront as leaders in the struggle to combat racism in hiring, discrimination in public welfare and public education, and poor nutrition and bad housing. Many of the mountain's black schoolmarms refused to accept rampant "Jim Crowism" as racial animosity grew. Ghettoized and under seige in many larger communities, the black women organized clubs, leagues, and NAACP branches to help maintain some vestiges of their freedom. Only after experiencing major political indifference and unresponsiveness did they migrate from the mountains with their families. By the carloads they joined the trek of blacks out of the mountains that continues to the present day.

Joining their friends and relatives in ghettos and marginal neighborhoods in Cleveland, Columbus, New York, Chicago, Baltimore, Washington, D.C., and other centers in urban America, the zeal and creative individualism of black Appalachian women continues to push them to the forefront of their professions nationally. Advertising agency executive Barbara Gardner Proctor comes to mind, as well as comediennes Jackie "Moms" Mabley and Shirley Hemphill. Singers Bessie Smith, Odetta, Roberta Flack, and Nina Simone have moved the American music world with their strength and passion, while writers Anne Spencer, Margaret Walker, Sonia Sanchez, and Nikki Giovanni and traditional oral historian Mary Carter Smith set down the stories of a culture and history unique to time. Other black women who migrated out of the southern mountains made their marks as state and local civic leaders, social welfare professionals, educators, and pursuers of a variety of other endeavors.

Among the black women who have remained in the mountains, some have chosen to join white action groups and take a lead in combating the myths and stereotypes of racism while engaging in social justice struggles that benefit all Appalachians. These women include black eastern Tennessee women such as Almetor King, long-time leader and current President of the Council of the Southern Mountains, the oldest self-help organization in the Appalachian region; and Billie Lollis who speaks out constantly about the evils of industrial pollution. In West Virginia, Amy Parks and Joan White are welfare rights activists who have been forced to contest personal court indictments. Helen Powell is a strong force in Black Lung and family health care programs. Madeline James is a Black Lung and pension activist always ready to do battle as was the late Anise Floyd, and Memphis T. Garrison is an important voice in the NAACP who originated NAACP Christmas Seals. Matty G. Knight of eastern Kentucky has been effective in improving housing and facilities in Cumberland and Wylda Harbin Parker and Viola Cleveland have long been social activists for equal rights for blacks and women in Appalachia. Other black women such as Etta Baker of northwestern North Carolina have quietly carried on the musical trditions of the southern mountains. Etta and her sister Cora Phillips maintain one of the finest guitar finger-picking styles in the region. Minnie Holley Barnes has chosen to spend her teacher retirement years writing about glimpses of southwestern Virginia through her Holley heritage. Dr. Mildred Bateman served for many years as the head of the West Virginia Department of Mental Health. The late Elizabeth S. Drewry was elected for seven terms to the West Virginia House of Delegates. Carrie Stewart of North Carolina and Beulah Perry of Georgia have chosen to spend their lives sewing, quilting, keeping house, and working in the garden on their farms in the mountains.

From the first settlements up to the present, black women all over the southern mountains have been providing leadership for peoples' struggles in communities, at work, and at home, as well as through churches, government, and social agencies. Depending on their age, their work, and their background, they have approached their struggles in different ways, but they remain consistent in playing an important role in fighting for improved conditions for all Appalachians.

The Tibbs family of Pocahontas County, West Virginia.

BLACK APPALACHIANS

Former slave of Johnson County, Kentucky, still living in 1910 when this photo was made. Courtesy of Alice Lloyd College Oral History Project.

NOW AND THEN

Hugh Sweeney, owner of wrecking company in Hinton, West Virginia. Courtesy of John Henry Memorial Foundation, Inc.

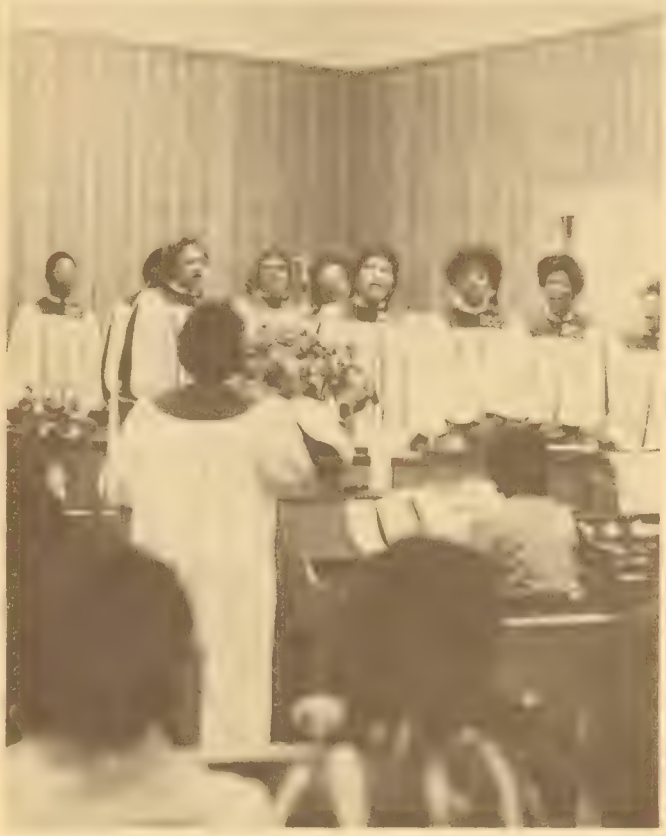
The Black Community in Tennessee's Oldest Town— Jonesborough, Tennessee

Chartered in 1779, Jonesborough is the oldest town west of the Allegheny Mountains. In 1819, the first newspaper in the United States devoted entirely to the abolition of slavery, the *Manumission Intelligencer*, (the next year changed to the *Emancipator*) was published here.

With many of the older buildings preserved and filled with antique stores, galleries and craft shops, the town has become a tourist attraction in East Tennessee. Though it is the Washington County seat, it remains a small, relaxed village with a population of 2,000.

Today, the black population of Jonesborough mumbers about 200. Except for tourism, there isn't much industry in Jonesborough. "Most leave because they can't find work," reports Virginia Sylvers. Others commute to Johnson City and other nearby towns for work. There remains a small, stable black community, people who, like Sylvers, still live in the houses where they were born, people who have called Jonesborough home for generations.

Many of the people in the black community can trace their history in Jonesborough to the time their families settled here just after the Civil War. They became farmers or ran small businesses. There was a black-owned hotel and restaurant, a blacksmith shop, barbershops, a movie theater, slaughterhouse and a dray wagon. The dray wagon, owned by Hal Yancy and Lewis Walker, hauled baggage to and from the trains that used to run through the town.

A black boarding school, the Warner Institute, operated from 1883 through the early part of this century. The building, a pre-Civil War boarding school, was bought in 1875 by Yardley Warner of the Society of Friends in Philadelphia. The Quakers' intention was to train teachers for the recently freed slaves, and to operate a primary school for the local black children. Today the school building, a rambling brick structure, is a tearoom and gallery, the Blue Iris.

There are three black churches in Jonesborough. The Bethel Christian Church is by far the largest. As such, it is the social center of the small black community in Jonesborough. In October the church celebrated their 119th anniversary. The original church building was just up the hill from the present structure. The choir has a well-deserved reputation for producing good music.

Until 1965 when schools here were integrated, this was Booker T. Washington school, the elementary school for the black children of Jonesborough. Now it is a storage building for the county school system. Inside, the walls of the office are still painted institutional green, but the big windows in the two classrooms and the gym are boarded up.

There are only two people still living who taught at Booker T. Washington School: Virginia Sylvers and Ernest McKinney.

Virginia Sylvers's family has lived in Jonesborough for 79 years. She attended a black elementary school in town herself (it was in a different building then), and when she went to high school, she had to ride the school bus to Langston in Johnson City, 8 miles away (in those days, a long ride on country roads). She remembers having to get up very early in the morning to wait for the bus, and looking at the whites-only Jonesborough High School that was practically across the street. When all the public schools in Tennessee were integrated in 1965, Sylvers was principal of Booker T. Washington. She was transferred to Jonesborough Middle School and then to Davy Crockett High School where she taught social studies. In 1982, after 33 years teaching, she retired.

Ernest McKinney taught and was principal of the school from 1953 to 1956, after which he transferred to Langston High School in Johnson City, a black public high school. When the schools were intregrated he moved to Science Hill High School in Johnson City where he became assistant principal. In 1985, after 33 years with the public schools, he retired. McKinney was also the first black elected to office in Washington County in 1968. He remembers, "Our election day was the same day that Dr. King was killed in Memphis, that same day I was elected as alderman of Jonesborough. In 1984 I didn't run for office, but my son Kevin ran and he won."

—Pat Arnow

The Homecoming

Margery Plummer and James Story

I arrived early in the park one hot day in August, 1984. All the way home to East Tennessee for my family reunion, I had been conscious of the excitement I always feel when coming home. The mountains, which have been called barriers, closing people in, shutting others out, have been my strength. Today they called me back, and looking toward the mountain tops, I felt myself grow stronger.

Hours later, at the end of this nearly perfect day, I looked about at the places of my childhood. I felt a rush of memories of times and places, people and events, and the memory of the strength and independence of those who came before me, went with me as I left the mountains.

A few weeks before, I had visited my great aunt and taped a conversation with her in preparation for my presentation of a brief family history to be used at the family reunion. I shared the tape with my friend, Margery. We listened again and again to the history of my family, told in the words of my aunt who had come many years ago from Georgia to East Tennessee. As we listened to the stories, we knew this account of my family, my culture and of an era should be preserved in writing.

The following narrative is the outgrowth of the tape I shared with Margery and my impressions of the reunion itself, which she so vividly interprets in the story.

Early mornings in the mountains were deceptively cool. In the slight chill, one could almost have imagined the approach of autumn. But as the sun climbed the sky, the soft grey mist that had obscured the mountaintops slowly disappeared.

James looked at the family history he was about to read. He'd looked forward to this homecoming, a coming together of relatives from all parts of the country, from all walks of life, the old and the young, babies and teenagers, some almost as close as his brothers and sister, others as distant as their geographical homes. All had come to be reunited and share their common heritage.

In this late August in Greeneville, in East Tennessee, tobacco stood ripe, ready for cutting, a golden promise of prosperity. Limestone rock thrust itself upward through the hills where a thin layer of topsoil held roots of thousands of small but hardy, rich green cedars, bringing early thoughts of Christmas.

James reached into his pocket for a handkerchief. Beads of perspiration stood on his forehead, then trickled down his face. He stood straight and tall. His Indian ancestry, though slight, showed in his features, in the high cheek bones and straight nose, the high smooth forehead and in the intensity of his brown eyes when in deep concentration. He wiped his face, looked at those seated and standing around him. James was a teacher and a musician, and his relaxed manner and ease of communication belied the almost fanatical fervor with which he worked. If his moods were dark at times, brightness was apparent, too, and joy outshone the gloom. He was one of the many members who had written, and were now writing, a continuing history of this family.

The park was wrapped in a blanket of summer heat. Not a breath of air was stirring and even the tall pines, whose lofty branches usually caught and moved the slightest breeze, now stood still and silent. Grandparents, cousins, aunts, uncles, close and distant relatives sat or stood, some children lay upon the ground. Pale yellow fans, like butterfly wings, moved gently, scattering the hot, humid August air. All eyes were upon James.

He looked at the program and read the homecoming theme, "We've Come This Far by Faith," an appropriate declaration, he thought. As he opened the program to the history, a feeling of the inadequacy of it overwhelmed him. Two pages! How could it all be written on two pages? 125 years of living and dying, of suffering and rejoicing, of births and deaths, despair and hope and love and yes, some hate. How could this many lifetimes, this much living be reduced to a few words on a piece of paper, history-making events narrowed to insignificance?

As James looked at the brief history he was holding, he remembered the afternoon he had spent with his Aunt Anabel getting information for the family history he would read; talking, taping, the recorder, her photographs and her memories, some as vivid as this morning, some partially obscured by time, still others shrouded in grief or deliberately lost. There had been sadness in her voice, "It's been so long and so sad, too," as they looked at pictures, identified relatives. More often she and James had shared hearty laughter and private jokes. "Is that John Arthur's woman? I told him if he didn't quit eatin' so much he'd be as fat as she is." Or when looking at pictures of women in the family, she identified "Mama's auntie, Aunt Annie" as a good woman. "She was a good, good woman." His memory held, and would not lose, the words unwritten, too many and some too personal for all to hear. He remembered Aunt Anabel's voice, almost devoid of the dialect often associated with people of the rural South. Instead, the dropped g's, the soft rounded r's, the rich, warm, southern inflections expressed the emotions she felt as she had reminisced, retelling the stories she remembered so well.

"Well, the family, as far as I can remember or was told, had its beginning in Farmington, Georgia. Farmington was just a very small community and Athens, Georgia, was the nearest town of any size. My grandfather, Jeff Anderson, and my grandmother, Adeline Anderson, had lived in Farmington as slaves." A sadness crept into Aunt Anabel's voice as she continued.

"We had a big fireplace and us children all sat around and Grandma and Grandpa, they told us about living as part of slavery, how they was treated in slave times. The master and mistress wouldn't allow them to pray. If they wanted to pray, they had to slip away and hide. It was so sad to hear them tell about how they was treated in slavery.

"We had a happy home when I was a child. It was a loving home. Mama was a good, kind woman, but she never told us but once to do anything. We knew we better do it. I think the only whipping I ever got from Papa was for taking up for my brother. He was always so mischievous, always getting into trouble at school. He knew I'd take up for him. Sometimes when we'd go to school, he'd stop on the way and play all day, then go home with the rest of us in the afternoon.

"The school we went to was small, just one room. Our teachers were good and very strict. I'll always remember that school and the pine trees around it, like the ones we have up here and all the pine needles on the ground. We had eight grades in that one room, and the older children helped with the young ones. We learned from each other.

"Our church and our religion were very important to us, just like it is now. The services were very, very long, and it was customary

for the women to cook food on Saturday, take it to church on Sunday and stay for three services. The grownups stayed nearly all day in church on Sundays. The children stayed at home. There'd always be some old person kept us children. I remember sometimes Mama or Aunt Nettie stayed with us. Kept us at home so we wouldn't get tired and restless during the long day at church. My grandfather, that was Jeff Anderson, was a very, very religious man, and how that man would pray! He would walk on his knees and pray just like he was lookin' in Heaven!

"My grandmother, Adeline, had always said that she never wanted to be taken to a funeral home when she died. Well, she died at our house, and they kept her out just one night. They laid her out on some planks, and I'd go into the room to look at her. They put a sheet over her and a saucer of salt on her chest, maybe to keep her from smelling, I just don't know. People came in that night and prayed and sung way over in the night. The next day they put her in a wagon and took her to the cemetery to bury her. I often wonder now to myself, wonder why she didn't want to go to the funeral home."

James knew instinctively that these were the stories briefly told, stories they would ask more about, would keep and tell and re-tell to children and grandchildren, stories of their heritage, the touchstone to which they would return again and again when reaching toward the future.

Aunt Anabel continued, "It was in the 1920's, I think, that the boll weevil destroyed the cotton crops and we couldn't make a living. Reverend Early was the first to come to Tennessee. Then he wrote Papa that there was work in the plants there. So Papa went and found work and saved enough money to send for us to come here and live. Lots of families came. Caleb Jordan and Mrs. Ida was from the same place and Walt's father and mother lived in the house with us for a long time. And the Scott family came from North Carolina. Well, we was excited about coming to Tennessee, but we hated to leave our friends and our roots there in Farmington. We shipped part of our belongings and all eight of us children and Mama rode together and sat together on the train. We brought food with us, so we didn't get hungry, but we did get tired. I remember we came through Atlanta. It sure was a big place, and I thought we never would get to Greeneville. I remember it just like yesterday. Papa was at the station waiting for us when we got there. We moved into a two bedroom house and added more rooms after awhile, and we all went to Friendship church just like you did."

These were the things James had wondered. Who am I and why am I here in this place at this time? The idea of a train trip fired his imagination, stirred a memory. He was a child back in school. In history class Mr. Doughty had told them about the Underground Railroad. It seemed strange to James because he had always thought of it literally as a train to freedom. The parallel intrigued him now. His ancestors had come from the South, too, travelling a railroad to a different kind of freedom . . . economic freedom.

James realized with surprise that he was slowly becoming a part of the history he had been reading. He sensed the merging of the past and of his recent past, with the present and like an actor making his first entrance in a play, he was now a part of the drama, not an observer of the past but a participant in the present. Above all, he felt a sense of place, of family, of belonging here at this particular time. The interview with his aunt had become a conversation, a dialogue, a remembering together.

James spoke first, "I remember those prayer meetings at Tate's Chapel. They were so intense, those Wednesday night meetings. We sang and prayed and Mama would say, 'You all get down there and pray,' and Mary'd say to me, 'You go on first.' We hated it then, but it's great when you look back on it. It stays with you." James laughed, remembering those Wednesday nights with his sister at church.

Aunt Anabel had smiled, then added seriously, "Well, any time, Brother, I am now, it makes me nervous to get up in front of people, but I say, the Lord is so powerful, so great, it sometimes makes you nervous."

James completed the thought, "And you humble yourself and then you're afraid you'll say something wrong, but He knows what's on your mind."

"He does. He sure does. I get to thinking about old times. People seemed to be happier then than they are now. We ate together, worked together, played together. Things was safer then. You could leave your doors unlocked at night. Things sure have changed. I often say everything's changed but the Lord. He's always the same." This last Aunt Anabel had said with a conviction that comes with complete faith.

Back in the park James was completing the reading of the family history: "The descendants of Mamie and Earl Anderson number thirty-six grandchildren, ninety great-grandchildren, and twenty-two great, great grandchildren, now living in all parts of the country."

Bits of lives, which had seemed insignificant, when put together like pieces of a puzzle, now made the history complete. The hymn, "We've Come This Far by Faith" was sung, repeating the theme of the homecoming, and after the benediction and the blessing of the bountiful meal to be served, minds were directed to the present. Families were reunited, brightly dressed children played and ran through the park. Proud parents of babies born since the last homecoming showed their offspring, and an old, old white haired lady holding a baby, kissed it gently, the pride in her heritage confirming her faith in generations to come.

Rhonda Horton of Boone, North Carolina, a soldier in World War I. Horton became a Mennonite minister in Boone where there was the only black district of Mennonites in the country. Courtesy of John Henry Memorial Foundation, Inc.

Mountain Child

Mittie L. Jordan

I was born a mountain child
Born of mountain farmers
Strong solid people who know that it is hard
To produce a harvest from a rock
Strong solid people
Who believe enough to try.
I was born a mountain child
But moved at an early age to the mechanical city
Where I watched carefully
White communities turn to small black villages
Then captured to be concentrated.
I watched these transitions carefully
So that I could grow to understand
How they could be reversed.
And because I believe in what I understand
It is difficult for me to sympathize
Beyond my beliefs, beyond my devotions
And so, I ofttimes become critical of
Others' superficial needs to give in
To material values...I was born a mountain child.
My roots are watered deeply in the
Fertile soil of my family's farm
And though I was raised a city machine
I was born to live by the basic truths of life
Born to know myself so that I cannot be defined.
I grew out to be New England schooled
And though its sterility caused me to
Constantly re-evaluate myself and my functions
My devotions have remained the same
Undisturbed by false fertilizers.
My roots have held firm in the soil
Of the mountain people
And a mountain child knows how to survive.
I was born a mountain child
Raised a city machine
Out grew New England schools
and recarved from the west ocean waves
Not until I out laughed the oceans roar
Did I realize that I was strong enough to struggle
And determined enough to win.
Born a strange mixture of reality and dreams
Understanding and believing in them both
Knowing that without a dream my life is controlled
And without a reality my dreams can never exist.
Understanding that if I am to survive
I must create and destroy them both.
I was born a woman
And by virtue of your birth
I understand and have conquered pain
To give life I have faced death
And turned my body inside out
To see myself live through myself
And know that I am me.
And if by chance I turn into an instrument
I would want to become a bass
because its words are strong and precise
Like the foundation of the mountain
Yet fluid enough to allow for your sounds.
Who am I, I am me
Born a mountain child
Raised a city machine
Slept beneath eastern and western skies
Kissed two oceans
Trudged through northern snow
And held the southern dirt in my hands
And I have let it all sift through my fingers
through my life and tried intensely
To know each grain.

Dorothy Bridwell Rhea, Margaret Keebler Bridwell (seated), Clarence Bridwell (on lap), Virginia Bridwell Sylvers, circa 1922, Jonesborough, Tennessee. Courtesy Virginia Sylvers.

Keila

Elvena E. Bowers

Keila is a pretty girl.
See her pretty black hair curl
See her fingers long and slim
See her any starlight dim
See her wings, an angel she
Snowflakes, rainbows, turning trees
Wind a whirl close to the ground.
Keila turn our world around.

Trial by Fire

Joseph Morgan

An excerpt from the fictional biography
40 YEARS IN THE WILDERNESS

Mom used to be fond of telling us the story of the night our father got saved and "gave himself into the hands of the Lord," as she often put it. And we kids, all twelve of us, grew fonder and fonder and ever fonder of listening to her each time she told it.

"We were married about two years before we had our first child," Mom would begin. "And from the day we got married till the night yo' daddy got saved, he went from bad to worse month after month, week after week, day by day."

Mom always paused dramatically following her opening statement, I suspect, in order to let the seriousness of the situation sink into our wandering little minds. Or, at least, what we fondly considered to be our "minds."

"Finally," Mom continued, "I got fed up. I just couldn't take anymore. So I decided to do something about it. But, "she admitted simply, "I didn't know what."

"Luckily for me, I had a good friend, a neighbor, who lived about a mile down the road. She was a good Christian lady who went to church every Sunday. And, in fact, every time the church doors opened, she was there, first in line, always.

"Her name was Bessie, Bessie Mae Estep, and I only saw her once or twice a week. But every time we got together she tried her best to talk me into going to church with her one night after yo' daddy went to sleep. 'Git saved,' she kept telling me, And you know what, child? I believed her," Mom confessed.

"The only problem was," she continued, "was that I had been raised in a Baptist church, and she was a Holiness lady—a 'holy rolly', as they used to say. And to tell you the truth, I was scared to death of them kind of people."

Mom always hesitated briefly at this point in her terse narration, partly for the purpose of fishing for the good listener, and partly for the purpose of searching for the right word.

"Well, I wasn't scared of her, not Bessie. She was the nicest lady I ever met." Mom would gush with an ambivalent feeling of pride in the friendship she shared with Bessie and shame in her humble vocabulary.

Gospel Singers Earl Gilmore and Sister Bessie Bures at the 1975 John Henry Festival. Courtesy of John Henry Memorial Foundation, Inc.

"But the very idea of getting trapped inside a church full of Holiness people yelling and dancing all over the place, well, that was a little bit more than I was willing to put up with. And the only thing I could think of worse than that," she added emphatically, "was getting trapped in the same house with yo' daddy — especially when he was raging mad and roaring drunk.

"But things got so bad at home that I finally decided that any God at all was better than nothing, even a holy roly God. And since Bessie just refused to give up on me, I finally got up the nerve to sneak out of the house late one night, and went to church with her.

"Between sneaking out on yo' daddy and walking into that church for the first time, I was scared to death. And the only thing that made me do it was the fact that I really didn't have nothing to live for anyway. Yo' daddy didn't want me. My daddy didn't want me. Nobody didn't seem to want me 'cept Bessie and her God. *And I didn't want them.*

"I was just going through the motions that night. I didn't really expect nothing to happen . . .

"But you know what, child? I wasn't in that church 10 minutes before something got a-hold of me. I don't know how it happened, but the fire really fell on me that night. For two whole years before then, I had been turning my back on God, wandering further and further 'way from the truth. But when the power of the Lord hit me that night, I suddenly remembered the words of Jeremiah the prophet:

"I said I wasn't gonna speak the name of the Lord anymore forever. I said I was gonna keep it all to myself. But the Spirit of the Lord was in my soul, like a burning fire, shut up in my bones, and I just couldn't keep it to myself."

By the time Mom spoke the name of Jeremiah the prophet, her voice had gradually risen and mellowed to the point where she sounded as if she was singing a psalm of faith, hope and inspiration to the one and only true God, even the great God Jehovah Elohim Himself.

No wonder a lot of people thought she was a better preacher than our father. At the very least, one might add, she did know more about the subject.

After giving us kids ample time to appreciate the artistry of her preaching skill, Mom would give a slight shudder, as if struck by a sudden chill, then gasp breathlessly:

"Jesus!"

Whether we were old enough to understand her motives or not, all of us remained silent, still, and wide-eyed, gaping at Mom until she resumed her drama.

"Well, sir," she continued, "when I got home that night, yo' daddy was there, waiting for me. He was sitting at the kitchen table, roaring drunk and raging mad. It didn't take me long to realize I was in a heap of trouble.

"'Where the blank you been?' he said, staring at me. 'And who the blank you think you are anyway, Liz, sneaking out on me like that?'

"With all the courage I could muster, I forced myself to tell him the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. And when I finished talking, he smiled at me, and then he just nodded slowly as if he was thinking. So, naturally, I thought he understood—till he set his sights on the two pistols laying on the table.

"One was on his end of the table, right in front of him. The other one was on the opposite end, near the door where I was standing. That was the last thing I remembered that night. And the only reason why I remembered that much was 'cause he pulled the same trick on me before, more than once.

"Later on, the next day, I remembered what happened after I saw the guns. 'Well,' yo' daddy had said quietly, 'if I git a shot off 'fore you do, at least you won't have to worry 'bout going to hell...will you?'

"But . . . what happens to you, if I win?

"He thought about it a while; maybe two minutes, maybe less, I don't know. But it seemed more like two hours to me.

"'Well,' he said at last, 'let's find out.'

"I was saved and knew it," Mom said. "But, I still didn't want to die. I wasn't ready for it. And I didn't want to kill nobody either—especially not on the same night I got saved.

"Jesus! I didn't know what to do.

"It took me almost 25 years to find the Lord. And just as soon as I found Him, it looked like yo' daddy was gonna send me home to Him. But I really couldn't blame him for wanting to kill me, though, not after what I had done. 'Cause not only had I snuck out on him that night, but I had even made a commitment to a strange new God, an unknown God, one that neither one of us had ever known before.

"Jesus, I didn't know what to do. I felt like the children of Israel must've felt when Joel the prophet told them to prepare to meet the Maker.

"Well, sir," Mom said heavily, "after I stood there a while staring at him, I started telling him about my conversion all over again. And while I was talking, I started moving toward the table. And the closer I come to the table, the tenser I got. And the tenser I got, the more my hands and arms moved out in front of me. And by the time I got to the table, my hands was so close to the pistol that neither one of us really knew what I was gonna do.

"It looked like I might try to grab the gun with either hand. So, yo' daddy couldn't do nothing else but act, and quick! And that's just what he did.

"At the last minute, just before I had to reach for the gun, he flung his chair back against the wall, bolted halfway to his feet—and then suddenly fell to his knees, crying like a baby, and calling on the name of the Lord."

"Halleluya" a voice in the crowd shouted.

"Halleluya."

The Blood of Kinfolks

Edward J. Cabbell

When blood spills
It splashes with a thud
Though warm
It is chilled as ice
And cuts as a jagged sword
Wounding deep
With a pain
That only kinfolks can feel

The Infant and The Outside World

Edward J. Cabbell

"Ralph! Ralph! Is you comin' boy," a deep voice sprang out of the cabin door.

"I'm a comin', Gramps! I'm a comin'," a tall, black, lanky boy tried to explain, rushing toward the voice.

"What took you so long? You knows I's sick. I coulda died in here whiles you out galavanting God knows where," Gramps shouted.

"Lawd a mercy Gramps! I was only scrubbin' the porch."

"You wasn't scrubbin' that porch with my new broom, was you, Ralph?"

Ralph held his head down. He rushed to give Gramps two capsules and poured her a glass of water from the crystal pitcher. Gramps had told him a thousand times or more to never scrub the porch with her new broom. By new she meant the broom she bought at the beginning of every year at the general store at the foot of the hollow. She always scrubbed the porch with lye. Lye wasn't good for the new broom straws. Gramps had a scrub brush for to scrub with. Ralph knew well the pain in his knees and knuckles after using that scrub brush on the porch.

"I'm sorry, Gramps," Ralph finally defended himself. He could feel Gramps' eyes piercing him from her bed.

"You needn't be sorry if you jest mind old Gramps, son," she mumbled. "Old Gramps is all you got and you's all old Gramps got. We gotta make de best of everything. One day old Gramps is gonna go and you's gonna have to run the old place. Yes you is, if dey don't come 'n' git you. Don't know when old Gramps gonna go. No suh, jest don't know."

Ralph wished Gramps wouldn't talk like that. It always frightened him. His whole world was Gramps. He had known her all fifteen years of his life. He was born right there in that two room shanty of hers. He never thought about anything in which Gramps wasn't a part. She was the only person Ralph really liked. Everybody else was always looking at him so funny. They called him crazy! Touched! But not Gramps. She told him not to pay any attention to folks. He was different. Gramps really loved him. She didn't even make him say Granny like other folks called her. He was her baby. She wouldn't let nobody in the whole wide world hurt a hair on his head. She said so.

Why is Gramps talkin' on goin' away? Ralph questioned himself. Is she gonna go up North and leave me? Gramps had told him that his real ma and pa had gone up North shortly after he was born. She hadn't seen hide nor hair of them since they left. It was a shame, even if his ma was her great niece. Seemed as if most of the colored folks had left the camp when they brought in them machines in the mines in the late fifties. Coal mining was taking care of itself. Didn't need all them colored folks no more. Folks jest dropped everything 'n' left as quick as they could for the big cities. Gramps always said. She wasn't leaving though. Her folks had been in these mountains and hills since they escaped the deep south during slavery. They had worked the farms, lumber camps, railroads and coal mines here. She was gonna stay right on the camp where she was born.

Maybe Gramps is goin' lookin' for my ma and pa, Ralph thought. She is always talkin' about goin' to leave and for me to learn to make the best of everything and all. Why's she gonna leave me though! She's jest teasin' me, he finally concluded. She said her ownself that I's all she got and she's all I got. Gramps ain't gonna up and leave all she's got for to go to some old city. She's jest teasin' me!

"What de world you thinkin' on boy?" Gramps interrupted Ralph's thoughts.

Nothin', Gramps," Ralph smiled and looked around the room. "I ain't thinkin' on . . ."

Boy you goin' craz . . ." Gramps caught herself. "Git outta here 'fore I takes a notion to git up 'n' smack yo' head off."

Ralph beamed with pride as he walked out of Gramps' room. She jest teasin' me. Jest teasin' he thought as he walked. He grabbed a biscuit from the pan on the edge of the cookstove as he reached for the scrub brush on top of the kitchen cabinet.

Ralph scrubbed and scrubbed the porch. It would be almost white before he finished it. A sharp pain and a loud growl in his stomach told him it was about lunch time. He rushed. He had to fix lunch today. Gramps had been sick ever since she cooked breakfast this morning. She felt a sharp pain in her chest and laid down in the bed. No more than ten minutes passed before Ralph had the porch glistening in the sun's rays. He thought about what he would have for lunch. He liked to sop honey with biscuits. That's what he would have for lunch, honey and biscuits, and a big glass of ice cold milk. Maybe Gramps wants some too, he thought. He watched the honey as it dropped on the plates and spread out. Then he put two biscuits on each plate and a fork on Gramps' plate. She didn't like to get food on her fingers. He took crystal glasses from the kitchen cabinet. They matched the crystal pitcher. He poured three glasses of milk, one for Gramps and two for himself. He noticed that the milk wasn't as cold as usual. He checked the refrigerator. The repairman ain't come yit, Ralph thought. He shoulda been done come by here a long time ago. Gramps been on him 'bout the Kelvinator 'bout to go bad. He 'ad better hurry up 'fore everything spoils.

Ralph tip-toed into Gramps' room, being careful not to drop the plates or disturb Gramps. He set the plates on the trunk at the foot of her bed and brought in the milk. Gramps was a light sleeper. She shouldda heard him by now. "Gramps!" Ralph called softly. She did not answer. "Gramps is you here?" he called a little louder. "I got yo' lunch!" Still Gramps didn't answer. Ralph tip-toed over to her bed. She was just lying there. She was very still under the big white bedspread she crocheted last winter. She sho looks really pretty lying there like that, Ralph thought. The snow whiteness of the bedspread and the bed linen accented Gramps' somewhat wrinkled, deep chocolate skin. Here and there a stringed plait of her almost silver hair would peep from beneath her pink crocheted night cap. Gramps was sleeping. But her eyes were opened, almost bucked. Ralph eased over to get closer to Gramps' bed quieter than Julie, their cat, used to walk across the hand braided rag rug Gramps used to put on the floor when company came. She had made the rug herself one winter.

Ralph touched Gramps' eyes. She didn't move. He tried to close her eyes. Still she did not move. He bent over and kissed her very softly, just as he used to do when he was smaller. Her skin was cold! He went to the kitchen and unfolded the patch quilt which was on top of his foldaway bed. Gramps made the quilt for him on his tenth birthday when he started sleeping in the kitchen on the foldaway. He laid the quilt on top of Gramps. He sat down and ate his biscuits and honey and Gramps' too. Then he drank all three glasses of milk. He put the dishes in the big dishpan on the stove and poured enough water from the tea kettle to barely cover the plates and tilted glasses. Gramps always did this to keep away the flies in the summer. He would wash the dishes later and clean up the kitchen a bit before supper. He had his outside chores to do now. As he left the shanty he began to quote an old saying Gramps kept repeating this morning.

All the worlds I strived for
Belonged to them not me,
And when my strivings over
The world will come to me.

Gramps always said this when she felt low. She picked it up from the old Creole lady from whom she purchased "religious" incense on the camp. Folk say old Madame Yvette used to be a school teacher in New Orleans before she recognized her powers. Anyway she was always quoting something that sounded real fancy. She always acted sorta changed ever since her husband got killed in one of the big mine explosions quite a while ago.

Ralph kept quoting the saying all day as he worked in the garden. He had a lot of work ahead of him. Gramps always said "Make yo'self useful. Ain't no use in wastin' time." Gramps had plenty of land to make yo'self useful on. She was one of the few colored folks on the camp that owned her land. She worked hard to keep the place up. She also tried to teach Ralph everything she knew since he didn't go to school, even how to cook. Ralph was proud of Gramps and tried to do everything she told him so that she would be proud of him too. Gramps always said, "Ralph, some folks ain't 'posed to learn nothing. You jest one of 'em. But you's a good boy. Yes suh, you means well. You gotta home with Gramps as long as she's here."

Ralph worked hard and fast. He began to sweat under the heat of the sun. His sweat and dirt stained shirt began to sting the open pores of his back. He shook the sweaty shirt loose from his back and worked faster. He stopped every once in a while to wipe the sweat from his forehead with a red bandana handkerchief. Gramps gave it to him during the spring. He giggled suddenly as he watched his sweat lick into the bandana and turn it a deeper red. I bet my blood is redder than this bandana he thought to himself.

Ralph worked until a few sharp stomach pains told him it was supper time. It was about dusk dark. He had to lock up the hen house, feed the hogs their late meal and maybe cook supper. He hurriedly ran toward the house.

Reaching the shanty Ralph ran into Gramps room to tell her all about what he had done during the day. Gramps wasn't there! He cut on the lights. Gramps still wasn't there! "Gramps! Gramps! Where is you at?" Ralph screamed. He ran back to the hen house. She wasn't there either. "Come back, Gramps!" he hysterically screamed. "Don't leave me Gramps! All you got is me! All I got is you! You said that, Gramps!"

Through his tear-filled eyes Ralph could see tire tracks on the dusty road. The repairman has been here. He and Gramps lived quite a distance from the main camp and few cars came to their house. They had no closeby neighbors so few folks came to visit them at all. "Come back, Gramps!" he screamed.

Suddenly Ralph heard the bells. They were the same bells he had heard when Julie, their cat, died. Gramps called them death bells. Gramps said that Julie was dead, Ralph began to think. Julie was lying real quite and stiff when Gramps made him dig a hole in the ground and put Julie in it and cover her with the dirt. Gramps is gone! What happened to Gramps? He searched their yard for a long time then he sat on the porch and cried all night. He didn't feel like eating. He just wanted to cry. He was still crying in the morning when a car drove up to his house. The car had a big star on its side. A white man was driving the car, but two colored boys got out of it and told him to get in the car with them. As the car drove off, something seemed to break inside of him and he began to cry in a hoarse voice that faded under the groan of the engine of the car.

Memory
Fred Millner

I lived the lie
do not we all
as age engulfs
our abilities fall

and fragile egos
we promped and enthralled
with past deeds grown great
and past failures made small

exaggeration impales us all
on a stake of tortured non-recall
for youth once-spent
our souls lament
and memory softens the fall

Ditty for My Daddy
Sondra Millner

All good poets write
  Poems to My Father
So here's to you Pop

You were
  a hillbilly bred
  Indian Red
Crazy old man

Heard what
  Robeson said
Became a Commie Red
  coal camp bred
  radical old man

Ran your moonshine
  read the New York Times
  worked the coal mines
  stayed an eccentric old man

Fought the union fight
  fought for civil rights
  & against imagined slights

Knew when any
  country had its coup
  made sure we knew it too

So here's to
  my
    Indian Red
  coal camp bred
Fine Proud Old Man

Life is an Image
Melissa Cabbell

Life is an image
All in ones mind
You see the happiness—toils too
Its reflections are dealing with you

Look deep within
Tell me what do you see
Is it life or death
You are seeking?

Look deeper
Into your own mind
Will you succeed
Or will you fail?

The answer is inside of you
So lead your life and I will lead mine
Because life is an image
All in ones mind

Granny
Chris O'Brien

Granville Hawkins, Granny, had lived in Iaeger, West Virginia, for most of his 88 years. Coming to Iaeger from Alabama in 1910, Granny was part of a great influx of black workers to the railroads and coalfields of southern West Virginia. He had heard, through relatives who had made the trip earlier, of the high wages and good living made by blacks and whites alike. If a man had a strong back he could make his way as a coalminer, regardless of his color or history. Granny started, at age thirteen, scattering lime dust in the mines (to lower the possibility of explosion) until he became stronger and able to take on more strenuous jobs. From his first day (when he made a dollar and felt like the richest man alive) until his retirement, Granny loved mines and mining and miners. It had been a hard life, for sure, with lean times and danger, but it was a life Granny had cherished. Now the black-lung disease had him in its grasp, and Granny would soon be dead.

Attended by his family—son Josiah, grandson Micah, and their families—Granny drifted in and out of the drug-caused stupor, sometimes exhibiting perfect lucidity, sometimes reliving his past as if it were just now happening. Often, he called for his wife, Constance, dead these fifteen years from influenza. Constance had been a good wife to Granny—caring, helpful, and just dominant enough to keep Granny and their two sons in line. She had fixed their meals, mended their wounds, and nursed them back to health a number of times. She had felt personally responsible when Elijah, their first-born, had died in a cave-in at age twenty-four. The mines had claimed her son quickly just as they would claim her husband slowly, though she wouldn't live to see it.

"Constance!" called Granny. "Constance! There's twelve men to feed here and you ain't even got supper started yet. You can't be gettin' neglectful just 'cause I'm laid up."

"It's me, Granny, Micah, your grandson. There's no one here but you and me. I just came in to see how you were doing."

Micah Hawkins heard his grandfather's words, knew that his grandfather was reliving the past, reliving a time when Granny and Constance, just married, shared the room in their house with ten single miners. Constance would see to their food and laundry at fifteen cents a day, and they would pay an additional ten cents a day for the roof over their heads. This was no great sum, but in 1927 it amounted to a fair piece of the family's income and helped to make ends meet when there was less work for Granny. This was a common arrangement within the company town, especially on Piney Hill, the section reserved for blacks before the town was integrated.

Granny, as a piece worker, earned anywhere from twenty-five to forty dollars per week, depending on the number of days worked. Granny's crew always pulled a good amount of coal from the ground, but during the slow times the mines might be closed for a week or more at a time. Thus, though the particular wages were good, the monthly income was inconsistent and varied greatly, fluctuating as much as thirty percent from one month to the next.

Granny would often recount the days long past when, as a needed supplement to the Hawkins table, they had a garden covering most of the available ground behind the company-owned house. This perennial garden, along with occasional hens, goats, and pigs, had seen the family through more than a few rough times. "One week," Granny would recall, "we lived on nothin' but beans from our own back yard. Times would get when the hens wasn't layin' enough eggs, and the goats wasn't makin' enough milk and they'd end up on the table, 'stead of under it!" At these tales Granny would break into a cackle and slap his knee once, but his eyes held a hidden glaze of sorrow and fear under the mirth and glow of the fireplace. Josiah, during these stories, would just sit quietly and hum to himself, only half listening, as if the pain of remembering were too great.

As the family gathered around the table to partake of Sunday dinner, as heads were bowed and thanks to God were given, Granny's mind drifted back and back, now into the sanctuary of the black Baptist church, the sounds of praise and worship ringing in his young ears. Prayers were offered; songs were raised by sad but joyous voices in moving spirituals sung not long ago by enslaved field workers under white whips of oppression; dances were danced as chairs were moved back in the makeshift sanctuary to make room; spirits were raised. A young preacher, full of fire and righteousness, raged with the power of class consciousness, railed against the mine owners and their *de facto* racism, rebuked the activities of the Klan and back-hand retorts against the minority workers, bred rebellion with his every word. Granny also remembered the short-lived tenure of the hot-blooded young man, how quickly he was replaced by a slow-witted company lick, "yes-sirring and no-sirring like a nigger in a cotton field." The company controlled even their spiritual nurturing.

As the family left the table and proceeded to the sitting room, Micah recalled for the family a story once told by Granny, of days such as this when he would sit at a fire with his friends. "The conversation went like this": Micah began.

> 'Fill me up another mug of beer.'
>
> 'Joesy, you done had four already. What you wanna drink all my homebrew for?'

James Patterson, retired farmer of Union, West Virginia. Courtesy of John Henry Memorial Foundation, Inc.

'I'm just tryin' to forget about the Man, the one keeps you and me and all of us down in that hole all day every day. You know them peckawoods keep us down there so's they can be walkin' on us all the time.'

'Now Joesy,' Ike would say, 'you know the onliest way a black man might could get up the ladder is with the white man's help. Your friend is the man with the money. If the whites have the money, then they're your friend. I ain't the onliest one as thinks so. There's Booker T. and a lotta others smarter than you think's so.'

'Sit down, Joesy,' Granny would yell. 'You know Ike don't mean nothin'. We all tired of bein' at the bottom of the heap. But it ain't much we could do about it now. Here's your beer, and shut up!'

"Each of those men was glad for a job, especially in those days," Micah continued. "But the pressures they had to face, being put between the white worker, the white owner, and the white union, sent them out drinking and ranting on more than one occasion. Granny told me once they all got tanked up on homebrew and dandelion wine and set off to burn down the crew boss's house. They ended up putting the torch to Granny's pants and sending him swearing and whooping into the pond over on that side of town. That was the last time they had that idea." The family chuckled. Of course, they had all heard all of Granny's stories over and over again, but each time they laughed or shook their heads, ignoring one another's fear of anger or hatred, dwelling, rather, on their own emotions.

"Damn the company, Pop! After all those years you gave them and they ain't even sent a flower or a card!" Josiah made plain his feelings of helplessness. "You work, give your life, the mine takes your life, and you can't even get the company to look your way. It just ain't right! Damn whiteys sit up in their office lookin' down they noses at us. Think they somethin' special."

"Don't you be comin' down like that on white men just cause a few of 'em don't feel the need to grieve me. Your cousin married a white man and your grandma lived with one after my father died. You grew up with 'em yourself."

It was true. Some members of the Hawkins' extended family were white and Josiah did grow up with white boys and girls as playmates. They had ridden horses together, fished, skinny dipped in the pond, laughed and cried together. In those days of Josiah's youth neither he nor the children he grew up with cared to differentiate their skin colors. Blacks, whites, Italians, Poles. They were just children.

"Yeah, I remember ya'll children danglin' your feet in the pond, little pink and brown and tan toes wigglin' and splashin'. Then you'd all run through the dust and you couldn't tell whose toes was whose." Granny's weak, loving hand jostled Josiah's shoulder, reminded Josiah of a time when his father would wrestle him to the ground and make him cry "uncle."

"But Pop, you know there's a difference between whites and us."

"Son, let me tell you how I see it. You've worked these mines awhile, so you know what it feels like with tons of rock over you and death lookin' at you all the time. There's a good bit of danger and a good bit of excitement, what with explosions and cave-ins. But you know, in these mountains, in those mines, when the lights go out and you're wonderin' if you'll live or die, it don't matter what color your skin is. In the dark, everyone's the same." Granny gripped his son's hand tightly, forced pain into Josiah's strong wrist, as if the old man were suddenly young again for a moment.

Granny Hawkins then met the innocence and power of death.

Furman Currington and his son, miners for the Black Mountain Coal Company 30—31 Mine, Kenvir, Harlan County, Kentucky, 1946. Courtesy Alice Lloyd College Oral History Project.

Officers of local union of Kenvir, Kentucky, C.W. Frazier, A.L. Talley, and Ike Murray. Courtesy Alice Lloyd College Oral History Project.

Naked Dawg

Fred Millner

While cruzin thru a once-booming coal town
My eyes were still perched on a once working, torn down
Tipple that crumbled when its life blood fumbled
Earth trembled and rumbled and refused once to yield
But decided to fill the tunnels with floods
Of Black and immigrated bloods

Now the only life to bear witness to this strife
Was a half scared-half naked dawg
Tits hangin' down, draggin' the groun'
Once tall and brown and now all broken down
With mites and other coal camp dawg plights
Snarled at me and refused to pleeze
For the handouts I'd laid out
At her once strong knees

Uncle Luke's Prayer

Glimpses of Tazewell Through the Holley Heritage

Minnie Holley Barnes

For this tale I am indebted to my Dad, known as Big Lee Holley in his youth and as Uncle Lee to all the town's folk in his later years. Dad was born on the eve of the Civil War in what is now Tazewell, Virginia. This small town in the southwestern corner of Virginia was called Jeffersonville at the time of his birth.

On cold winter nights while seated around the fire, Dad would often repeat stories that had been told and related to him in his childhood, as well as some which, through bitter experiences, changed his whole life.

Dad's graceful courage, bold countenance and deep sounding voice made not only his own children, but neighbors' children and all the town children hang to his stories as words of soundest truth.

About Uncle Luke, he would begin thus: "As I recall the early days, some characters stand out most vividly. The most distinct of them all was Uncle Luke, a saintly slave called a Gospel Preacher. His power with prayer, his devout Christian life, and faith in God sent fear amoung the slaves, and many slave owners would draw near to hear him preach and pray."

As early as I can remember, I heard Mama and many of the 'old folks' of the town tell with deep sincere words about the power of Uncle Luke's prayers. Born in slavery, he learned to read the Bible from his master's children. He worked as a field hand and many slaves recalled his tenor voice ringing in the woods while cutting timber and building rail fences.

In his early manhood, he was given the privilege to preach among the slaves. Several incidents happened on the plantation which were credited to Uncle Luke's prayers. The slaves would draw near with deep respect and reverence to listen to him. Mama often told me how he would sing, shout, and preach so forcefully that even the slave owners would draw near to listen.

The story goes that on one dry hot summer on the hillside of his master's plantation, a fire broke out in the timber land. It was spreading through trees, under bushes and destroying the logs and timber for miles around. These logs were valuable for building fences and houses. The slaves and neighbors fought the fire until they were exhausted. The Master inquired, "Where is Uncle Luke?" at a time when he was so desperately in need. One of the slaves went to the hilltop and began to search for Uncle Luke. When he found him, he was high on the mountain side kneeling beside a stump in prayer. The slave who found him stood looking in disgust and asked "Why aren't you helping to fight the fire?" He soon arose from his knees saying in a calm voice, "Call the boys and tell them to go home. God is going to put out the fire." Those that were with him said they had never seen a clearer day. They only stared at him. He took off his hat and walked down the mountain side with his hat in his hand praising God. After a while a dark cloud appeared from nowhere no larger than a man's hat. After that the slaves said they had never witnessed a harder rain. It put out the fire. After that, he was called the "Gospel Preacher" who prayed for rain and God sent rain to put out a destructive fire that swept over fifty acres of land.

REVIEW

Free Hill: A Sound Portrait of a Rural Afro-American Community

by Elizabeth Peterson and Tom Rankin
Tennessee Folklore Society TFS-107, LP album with accompanying brochure (20 pp., map, photos, transcriptions, commentary, bibliography)

Richard Blaustein

Free Hill is an isolated black community in the rugged hill country of Clay County in the upper Cumberland Rim of Tennessee, directly adjoining the Kentucky line. Founded by freed blacks before the Civil War, Free Hill's traditions were passed down from generation to generation by word of mouth until the community and its people came to the attention of folklorist Elizabeth Peterson while she was conducting a cultural resources survey for the Tennessee Department of Conservation during 1981. She and fellow folklorist Tom Rankin returned to Free Hill in 1983 to spend several months documenting the oral traditions of the community, including accounts of its origins, exploits of local heroes and characters, and recollections of encounters with hooded nightriders, along with examples of more familiar genres of Afro-American folklore such as blues singing, preaching, praying, and gospel singing. The handsomely and copiously illustrated brochure Peterson and Rankin have produced to accompany this album is a significant piece of scholarly work in its own right, ranking with such major treatments of the history and culture of Upland Southern blacks as Lynwood Montell's *The Saga of Coe Ridge* (University of Tennessee Press, 1970) and Gladys-Marie Fry's *Night Riders in Black Folk History* (University of Tennessee Press, 1975).

The black Appalachian experience has not been quite like that of blacks in the rural Deep South or the urban industrial North. The climate and terrain of the southern Appalachians did not lend themselves to the development of extensive plantations, and consequently the rigidly stratified class and caste system of the lowland South did not gain a firm foothold here. Slavery and discrimination did exist, however, and black communities like Free Hill sought to maintain a marginal, almost invisible relationship to their white neighbors. Free Hill remained a mountain farming community throughout most of its history; the men supplemented their incomes through logging and rafting, the women, by laundering and domestic work in neighboring white settlements and resort hotels. Until the turn of the century, living conditions were rugged at best; the people lived in log houses, slept on straw ticks, and otherwise practiced a subsistence farming life-style eked out by various types of seasonal labor. Despite these material hardships, the people of Free Hill managed to establish and maintain their own church and school. The history of these institutions, though, points out the ambiguous relationship of the Free Hill blacks to their white neighbors; stories are told not only of the Klansmen who put the old log building which served as both a church and school house to the torch, but also of the sympathetic whites who helped them rebuild.

Indeed, the uneasy relationship between blacks and whites in this mountainous section of the Border South goes back to the original settlement of the area. According to some accounts, the first blacks in what is now Clay County, Tennessee, were the freed slaves of a white woman who moved to this section from Virginia; some Free Hill residents say, though, that these early black settlers were not merely her slaves, but her children. These varying accounts cannot be corroborated through existing court records, but as Peterson and Rankin point out, these tales are not simply historical documents but also expresssions of beliefs and attitudes. In this case, we are given a rare opportunity to come to terms with the unspoken tragedy of people whose kinship with the larger white community has never been fully acknowledged, let alone accepted. The variations, then, in these accounts of the origins of the Free Hill community cannot be solely attributed to the vagaries of oral transmission, but also to the ambiguous identity of people of mixed ancestry in a society which has yet fully to overcome its legacy of racism and discrimination.

Only marginally accepted by the outside world at best, the people of Free Hill, like so many other Southern blacks, found their major source of solace and security within the church. As the result of out-migration and economic change, Free Hill has become an aging community, but nonetheless the church remains a vital social and cultural institution. We are able to hear congregational singing, praying and preaching recorded at the Free Hill Church of Christ, complete with the spontaneous responses and exclamations of church members. It should be noted that there is little apparent difference between the performance style of the Free Hill congregants and other rural Southern black religious singers; most of their songs are popular Stamps-Baxter gospel standards. Peterson and Rankin, however, are not concerned with the unique character of these gospel songs as much as presenting a realistic portrait of the forms of religious expression now current in this community. As they tell us, most other types of music and entertainment once extant in the Free Hill community have been overshadowed by the mass media, bringing Free Hill blacks closer to the black American mainstream. Discos have replaced square dances; radios and tape players have replaced fiddles and banjos. There is one secular songster, Robert "Bud" Garrett, left in Free Hill, and today his audience consists mostly of tourists at folk festivals.The church, however, is still a living presence in Free Hill; story-telling and reminiscing about the past are evidently vital traditions, too, to judge by the fascinating accounts which Peterson and Rankin have captured on this outstanding album, which was issued by the Tennessee Folklore Society with funding provided by the Tennessee Valley Authority and the Folk Arts Division of the National Endowment for the Arts. Teachers in particular will find this album extremely valuable in illuminating an often neglected aspect of Appalachian life and culture, though anyone concerned with Appalachian Studies, Black Studies, or folklore should find it highly worthwhile. Strongly recommended.

Limited numbers of this album are available to qualified educators free of charge; otherwise, $6.00 to Tennessee Folklore Society members, $7.00 to non-members. Write TFS, Box 201, MTSU, Murfreesboro, TN 37132 for further information.

Bud Garrett, Free Hill, Tennessee, 1982. Photo by Tom Rankin.

Appalachia:
An Old Man's Dream Deferred

Edward J. Cabbell

As I ride the mountain curves
That make one mile ten
And my going greets my coming
I reminisce my past days
In the mountains of Appalachia.
I recall my five day weeks
Among the diamonds —
That glisten and reflect
The sweat of my brow
And make me proud
Of my aches and pains
And silicosis and black lung
And John L. Lewis and the pension.
I recall my buddies
And slate falls and explosions
And union dues and company doctors
And script money and company stores
And friendly coal camp houses
Where smoke spirals from chimneys
And meets the tipple dust
Causing an excess that returns upon us,
my wife and kids and other families,
Causing us to cuss and fuss
and scrub with lye soap
In zinc tubs filled with hydrant water
Boiled in the big tea kettle on the cook stove
That stands near the kitchen cabinet and breakfast set.
I recall the Saturday night balls
Or fights and brawls
And women and liquor and cards
And fish fries and barbeques
And wiener roasts and excursions
And ball games —
All kinds of Saturday fun
That ends in Sunday School and Church
And occasional revivals
And preachers and deacons
And brothers and sisters
And prayers and collection plates
And rallies and homecomings.
I recall the bare beauty
of stripped mountains
That belch black diamonds
And choke as we crawl inside
To retrieve what is left
Leaving a gully that fills
With leeched water
For children to swim and drown every summer.
I recall the shanties
And houses of bosses
And homes of superintendents
And spring rains, and fall winds
And winter snows and summer sunshines
That bring new faces to the hills every year
And Christmas and Easter
And the Fourth of July
And fishing and hunting seasons
And walks in the mountains
And P.T.A. meetings and lodge meetings
And trips to the county seat
And funerals and birthdays
And other memories that practically
Bring to me tears.
But as I ride the curves of my homeland
I must view my dreams
For she is empty and dried and dismal
And her misery hangs heavy in the air of her discontent
I reach out to touch her but find her vanished -
An old man's dream deferred.

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An Appalachian Dilemma

I, too, am an Appalachian
For years I have breathed fresh mountain air
traveled dusty mountain roads
drank cool mountain stream water
and fought the yearly autumn fires
between
Hog killing, game hunting, mule hitching,
soil tilling, harvest gathering, syrup making
berry picking, home canning, feast tasting
banjo, guitar and fiddle picking
quilt making, all kinds of weaving and liquor
still watching and church revival going times
Yet, to many folks I am not here
My most visible hue make me invisible

I move swift and silent through these hills
Nobody sees me and nobody hears me
This is my assurance of acceptance and survival
so universally understood
that I am not even a subject heading
in an index
Still, I, too, am an Appalachian
I dream and I wonder as I wander
and ask myself
When will Appalachia see me as I see Appalachia
When will she recognize her long lost sons and daughters
who have toiled on her soils
laid steel through her mountains
and crawled into her bowels to retrieve
her beautiful black diamond overload
that shakes the chill from all her children
When will she tell my long neglected story
while accompanying herself on the lute/drum
instrument that I long ago taught her to
frail while singing in dronelike rhythms
in celebration of her beauty
When will Appalachia see me as I see Appalachia
When will she open her arms and take me to her breast
truly understanding that
I, too, am an Appalachian —Edward J. Cabbell

Malvine Hoge of Norfolk, Virginia (left), visiting her cousin Dorothy Rhea in Jonesborough, Tennessee in the 1940s. Courtesy of Virginia Sylvers.

NOW AND THEN

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